Let Your Tongue Taste Salvation

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Let Your Tongue Taste Salvation

by solarteacup

Summary

Father Hannibal Lecter has his faith tested and torn when a troubled stranger walks into his church seeking reprieve.

"He looked up and found an elaborate painting of God staring down at him. *He saw everything.* For the first time in a long time, Hannibal's faith started to falter. *He saw everything but stopped nothing…* A little chip in the once pristine marble foundation. How did Will get under his robe, his skin, and make him feel better than God ever had, ever could? One simple man uprooting everything he had worked towards and desired, why was Hannibal okay with that? More than okay, he wanted more."

Hollow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal walked down the aisle of the church towards the podium, robe flowing just above the floor. The church was empty, his only company his own thoughts; he preferred it that way. He often ruminated on his journey here, all the joys and horrors that brought him into God's hands. He never thought he'd end up here, but he wasn't surprised fate robed and collared him. Before reaching the podium, made of smooth, dark oak, Hannibal redirected and sat in the pews, front row. He hadn't been on this side of a sermon in quite some time. Candlelight flickered in his periphery, creating a warm glow around him. He folded his hands in his lap and closed his eyes, taking in a deep breath to dive into the onslaught of memory.

As a young boy, Hannibal lost his voice. The horrors of the world took the only thing he had left. Muted and hidden within himself; he had nowhere else to turn but inward. By brick and stone, he carved out a place for himself to reside, somewhere protected. It wasn't all safe, however. There were rooms filled with screams, wails echoing endlessly against the walls. He didn't dare walk those halls, afraid he wouldn't be able to stop himself from testing the doorknob; or maybe afraid he wouldn't be so lucky to escape a second time. Curiosity and self-preservation were a delicate balance. After the loss of his immediate family, witnessing the brutal murders of his parents and sister, his aunt and uncle took him in. They were only casual church goers, but they dragged Hannibal along every Sunday they attended. Hannibal quickly became enraptured in the power of God, his control over life and death, all the things he created. Young Hannibal wondered how much power rested in his small hands, how much he could change the world around him if given even a taste, a sliver, of divine power. He'd been without control, without power for so long; perhaps God could help him find it.

He hadn't talked for months, maybe more. His aunt and uncle stopped trying to force his voice to erupt. They worried their incessant demands were just pushing it further down his throat, to burn in the acrid pit of his stomach. It had been long enough Hannibal had even forgotten what he sounded like, but soon prayers were answered. Hannibal stopped swallowing his fear and finally found his voice in the confines of confession. The small, enclosed space shielded him from the world; it finally stopped compressing his chest long enough to speak. It felt as if he took the first deep breath he ever had, cool air soothing all the singed cries in his lungs. He had so much to say, an endless time of thoughts and feelings barricaded by teeth, just begging to be released. The dam finally broke, spilling forth and saving him from drowning. He sat in the booth for a long time, the priest surprisingly patient. So much sin and horror in someone so young; Hannibal could smell the pity. As soon as his voice croaked, he couldn't stop. Fear after sin after worry flooding forth, faster than he imagined, faster than the priest could comprehend. Hannibal didn't think he even needed the priest to understand, he just needed it *out.* And then it was done as quickly as it began. There wasn't much the church would not forgive, the very foundation of their faith. Hannibal quickly learned the sanctity of the confession booth; nothing that went in would ever come out lest he allowed it. The seed of a simple power bloomed in his hands, enough to let him feed. The giver of absolution sworn to secrecy, nothing more than a messenger, a vessel for

God himself. It wasn't his place to judge, just listen. Hannibal took great comfort in it, using it to his advantage.

Hannibal found solace in the small wooden box time and time again, curating his peace of mind one confession at a time. As his sins worsened; he could smell more fear beyond the mesh, but it didn't stop him. Fear was infinitely better than pity, and part of him felt charmed by their fear. Power could be found over those who feared you. If nothing else, he felt *encouraged*. He was safe there, safer than he had ever been. Safer than in homes and amongst people sworn to keep him safe. It did not matter whose life he took or what crime he committed. He would call back to God snuffing out the rude and the betrayers, the sinners and blasphemers. He felt untouchable. As his crimes evolved, and the consumption of flesh evolved from occasional to routine, he had to ask himself *how different was it than the blood and flesh of Christ*? All the sins he could ever commit, ever think of, would be absolved. He didn't need to answer to the justice system of man when God himself was looking down and embracing him. Just a confession here and there to cleanse his soul.

Still, he felt more akin to God than subservient to him. He was better than his fellow man; above the two-legged pigs of the world. He killed as God did, devoured as God did, and decided the fate of man as God did. How different could he really be from God himself? There were still small gaps between him and true divinity, and no amount of confession could bring him all the way. The next logical step for Hannibal was priesthood, and he hoped that this was the last barrier to what he so desperately sought, what he felt he deserved, right down to the very marrow that fed his veins.

Hannibal convinced himself priesthood and the church was the closest to God he could possibly achieve. And for a while, he believed it to be the only reason to pursue such a life. To give up all the pleasures and possessions of the world for a chance at ascension. Yet there was a part of himself, his past, Hannibal tried to ignore. Little gnawing teeth and tendrils kept him from fully escaping what he wanted to forget. There were sins he could never confess, thus sins that could never be forgiven. Those memories plagued him; some days he could stomp them out. Others, it was all he could think of. It was easier to accept his reason for this new life was for his betterment, and not just to forget what he could not control or change. No amount of holiness could give him enough power to erase what had been done. Regardless of his reason, Hannibal pursued priesthood; to ascend and atone.

Hannibal opened his eyes, the candles noticeably lower than they were before. He sighed and stood, walking to each candle and snuffing them out with his fingers one flame at a time. Saints and martyrs decorated the walls, staring down at him. Not long ago, he'd committed another crime, one he didn't feel the need to confess, the brutal murder of the previous priest. His sudden disappearance opened a place for Hannibal, and he took it greedily. It was easy to blame the death of his predecessor on the wicked and godless heathens surrounding them, hopeless and lost souls attempting to tear down the sanctity of God and his followers. Nobody would expect a poised and well-behaved priest as the culprit. Hannibal had been to many parishes, and each had their story, some more interesting than others. Now, it was time to weave himself into the cloth of this church. He wondered what this place could offer him; if there was something new, or the same recycled people and confessions. Inevitably, Hannibal would grow bored of this place, too. Until then, he would call it 'home'.

Thus far, there was nothing particularly novel. Hannibal was learning all churches were the same, the people never changed. The paintings depicted the same saints, and the stain glass always the same colors just rearranged. People came and went confessing and crying, begging for relief. *I cheated on my wife. I lied to my children. I question my faith.* Nothing new, nothing extraordinary. With each person, he imagined their face, then imagined killing them. Especially the rude ones, the ones he didn't feel a hundred hail marys could spare. Ones he knew even God couldn't forgive. He tried not to kill too close to home, especially after having already done in the previous priest. Every interaction made him more disgusted with the simplicity of people. Sometimes he dreamed of departing earth and finally settling into the eternal finale that awaited him. But Hannibal was patient; he valued himself too much to leave by his own hand. He might let himself succumb to the hands of someone worthy, but he doubted such a person existed. For now, he would be patient enough for a natural end. He had work to do on earth, truly earning his way into heaven. Part of him was glad he was barred from pleasure of the body; sex with anyone he'd seen thus far was an entire sin on its own. However, Hannibal wasn't the most in line priest; he found other ways to imbibe. Wine, fortunately for him, was quite acceptable, though he loathed the cheap communion wine. It felt like penance. His only extracurriculars were killing and devouring, but only those who deserved it. As close as he felt to God, he knew God would understand his choice; he was simply sparing him the labor of another flood.

When the candles were all out, and a gentle smoke lingered, Hannibal looked back on his church and sighed. He knew he would be very much alone in this new life, but *loneliness* was not something he anticipated. His own company was plentiful, but he wanted something new, something more. Someone to understand him like only God seemed able to. But someone he could see, who could talk back to him, someone he could *touch.* He wondered if he would still be this lonely even without this life, for who could ever truly understand him? Was he doomed to traverse this life alone, regardless of the paths he so meticulously chose? He nodded to the empty pews and retired to his room. *Tomorrow is always a new day.*

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The crime scene was nothing like Will had ever seen, and he'd seen more than his fair share, more than he ever wanted. Mangled bodies, broken bones, ravaged flesh… but this one was *different.* Even the air around it wasn't the same. This scene, this display, was almost *beautiful,* a work of art. It was easy, almost too easy, for Will to place himself into the thoughts and mind of a killer; it was how he was able to catch them. To wind back time, see it all unfold by his own hand, feel every reason and motive and emotion behind it all. Why was this one different? What kept him from seeing it all?

He knew it was a new killer to this town, someone who had never killed there before. *But this isn't their first murder, not with this level of expertise.* The craftsmanship was novel to him, almost impressive. Cuts were clean, no blood was spilled, no mess. Flesh and viscera perfectly orchestrated like paint on a canvas. He couldn't help but laugh, feeling it a bit on the nose to recreate the crucifixion of Christ with a dead priest's body. *No, not Christ*… St. Peter, upside down; unworthy of the same fate as the son of God. *Man could never be on the same level as something so holy and precious.* Whispers behind him suggested this was an act *against* God and the church, but Will knew better. It was etched so clearly in every fold of

cloth and placement of limb. *This isn't against God, it's for him… of him… power and divinity flowing through man. A gift.*

The motive was unclear to Will, an uncommon setback for him. This killer wasn't like others, there was a wall preventing Will from truly getting inside. So many thoughts sat on his tongue – he was never afraid to say them before. *This killer is lonely but accepting of that fate, bored… this was a test for themselves. One of many, not the first, nor the last.* He walked around the body, unable to stop himself from touching it. He was torn from thought, the voices behind him much louder now.

"The body is spotless, barely a bruise or mark on it. Definitely no blood. Body drained and not a drop anywhere." Beverly always spoke with confidence. She was good at her job, and Will admired her.

"Not even seepage near the incision. Seamlessly cut open and closed, expert suture work." Zeller was good at his job, too. They all were. He interrupted Will more, coming up with his own theories before Will could think, so it annoyed him, but he wasn't a bad person in the slightest.

Will squinted and cocked his head. "What incision? Where?"

Zeller pointed the tip of his pen at the body. "Abdomen, left hand side. There is a clean incision under the robe, couple inches. This guy knew what he was doing."

Will turned back towards the display and spoke softly, nearly enchanted by what was in front of him. "This wasn't a rebellion against the church, this wasn't the act of a scorned follower. This was… devout." He walked over to the body, gently touching the cold skin through a gloved hand. "The body was cleaned, cared for. It wasn't senseless or angry. He was treated like a martyr for his cause or a saint in the making. It's respectful to wash the body of the holy who have fallen, ensuring they were as presentable as possible for God."

Will paused, looking at the body pinned to an inverted cross. "But the killer thought themselves *better* than the priest, or at least so below Christ he didn't deserve the same display." *Playing God, I see. Not just alongside him.*

Price chimed in, surprisingly silent this time around. "And the incision? How does that play into this?"

Will turned around and took his gloves off, the start of an ache behind his eyes. "See if any organs are missing when you take him to the lab."

"Missing organs? You suspect that just from looking at it?" Beverly tilted her head, confused but amused.

Will nodded and smiled weakly. "Do they not imbibe on the blood and body of Christ?"

Beverly crossed her arms and smirked at him. "Yeah, with wine and dry, plain communion wafers. Not actual cannibalism."

“Maybe this is symbolism for the symbolism. Drained of wine, and crackers for the road. Or just a trophy, but I can guarantee something is missing.” Will left the crime scene as his mind started to whirl. He could see the killer, but more like a shadow than a person. Seeing only as much as the killer wanted to be seen. No evidence was left behind, and even the details Will picked up on, he knew were intentional. It was more than a symbolic murder, it felt like a message. But to whom? God, the police, themselves?

As he started to leave, Will was stopped by Jack. A strong, firm hand on his shoulder was holding him back. “Where do you think you’re going, Will?”

Will shrugged. “I was, uh, headed home. Sorry Jack.”

Jack shook his head, the grip on Will’s shoulder a bit tighter. “Home? You just got here.”

Will nodded, forcing a fake, weak smile. “I-I know, Jack. I just…” He paused, hoping to gather his true thoughts, at least the ones he felt safe sharing. He kept a lot from Jack, for both their sakes. There were parts of himself even Will didn’t want to acknowledge, let alone share with his boss. But crime scenes were getting harder and harder to look at. Will wasn’t sleeping, and if he was, it was full of nightmares. Cold sweat soaked through all his sheets night after night. It was eating at him for a while, longer than he wanted to admit; he felt safer in the classroom away from it all. Sympathizing with killers… he always felt a piece of himself was chipped away, filled in with the new name of the week. He did his job because no one else could, but it was exhausting. Feeling good about what he was doing was quickly overshadowed by all that followed him home. He was losing himself. But it was never something he could outright admit to Jack. He already avoided an official psych evaluation, usually customary for all FBI agents. Both he and Jack knew he wouldn’t pass so it was never enforced; Jack needed him in the field too much to risk him being barred.

He hadn’t fully recovered from the Hobbs case; it was the first time he drew a gun and killed someone. He’d drawn a gun before as a cop, but never pulled the trigger. Then he pulled it ten times. It didn’t bother him like he expected it to. Will didn’t want to admit it to himself, but he *enjoyed* it. It felt good to kill him. Catharsis and justice and reprieve all wrapped up in one. Jack suggested he go to therapy, and he did. Jack’s suggestion was more of a command, a requirement to be deemed sane and sound. One single session was all that was required, and all Will was willing to take part in. Will hated therapy, and never went again. He said all the right things to make sure he wouldn’t have to come back. He lied for 50 minutes straight, counting down the seconds until he was rubber stamped as ‘okay to return to work’. Will wasn’t sure ‘work’ was what he wanted, but he wanted it more than the alternative.

“Will? Are you still with me?” Jack’s booming voice broke through the fog of Will’s mind.

Will nodded again. “Yes, I’m here.”

Jack sighed, gently shaking Will’s shoulder and letting him go. “Go home, Will. Get some sleep if you can. And uh,” he paused, “maybe consider something *other* than therapy.” He knew how against therapy Will was, but knew he needed help of some kind, whatever Will could tolerate. And he also knew he couldn’t court-order more help for him. Will needed to do it on his own.

Will scoffed playfully. “Like what?”

Jack smiled and gloved his hands, preparing to go back onto the scene. “Maybe confession.”

“Confession?” He thought the suggestion comical. “As in… church…”

Jack shrugged and referred to the dead priest. “Maybe they can help you.”

“With the case, or with myself?” Will furrowed his brow, genuinely unsure what Jack meant. Jack didn’t respond and merely walked away, leaving Will alone with his thoughts again.

Will was never much of a church person, never really having faith in something he couldn’t see and feel. He took advantage of his five senses to make sense of the world; he didn’t feel the need to look up and out. His father would take him to church on occasion; Will wasn’t even sure his dad believed in it or if he hoped his son could in his stead. The church always felt out of reach for Will. He didn’t feel connected in his youth, feeling more out of place than he did as a kid at a new school. As he grew older, certain thoughts and proclivities made him feel unsafe in a place so openly against him.

He didn’t know what exactly compelled him to follow Jack’s advice. Will convinced himself it was for the murder case and not himself. What better way to research motive than at church? Will drove to the church the dead priest harkened from, sitting in his car in the near empty parking lot. It wasn’t a very lively place on a weekday; he was at least thankful the dead priest wasn’t found on a Sunday. *What symbolism that would be, though.* He forced himself from the car, jokingly convincing himself he wouldn’t burst into flames as soon as he crossed the threshold. He walked to the front, hand trembling a bit in anticipation, and then he pushed open the heavy doors.

Candles created a halo of fire along the walls of the church, sun beamed through painting the floor through colored glass. He stretched his neck and eyed the confession booth and walked towards it, entirely unsure what to do or expect. Was it even a place to conduct an interview, was it appropriate? He’d seen confession in movies, but how accurate could that be? He stood in front of the surprisingly large wooden structure, *a glorified box with secret and sin buried into the grain.* He reached a hand out to touch it, wondering what he could garner from it, but he was interrupted when he heard a distant voice call to him.

A priest approached Will, arms open and face warm. “Welcome to my parish. Some call me Father Lecter, but I personally prefer just ‘Hannibal’. Can I ask your name?”

Will stuttered, not expecting a face-to-face conversation with anyone, let alone the priest. “Will Graham.”

Hannibal nodded and placed a gentle hand on Will’s shoulder, fingers wrapped around tense muscle, smiling as he kneaded with gentle fingertips. “Welcome, Mr. Graham. What can I help you with?”

“Please, just Will.” He swallowed hard. Hannibal’s touch felt inviting. Normally a stranger touching him was off-putting. As much as he wanted touch, it never felt quite right. Even with those he knew and welcomed, there was a twinge in his nerves he could never quite

shake. A gnawing little voice telling him *no, no, no!* So then, why did *this* feel right? What made Hannibal, a priest, different from everyone else? It all felt absurd, and he stammered and smiled awkwardly. “I, uh, just…” Will couldn’t find the thoughts, words ensnared in panic. Where could he even start? *I am investigating a murder of the previous priest. I enjoy killing. I’m gay, I-* His swirling thoughts were interrupted by another hand on his other shoulder.

Hannibal could tell Will was flustered, overwhelmed. It was easy to see in the darting of his tired eyes and tense posture. Whatever shrouded his mind needed patience and an attentive, listening ear. “Can I offer you a confession, to help ease what worries you?”

Will was taken aback. He tried to make the excuse, “I’ve never confessed. Never really been to church.”

Hannibal smiled, letting go of Will’s shoulders. “Everyone has a first confession, and they are most welcome in my church.”

Will looked around and saw that the pews were not entirely empty, lone souls coming in to pray and find solace. He shook his head; if he was to confess, he needed to be alone. “Not right now, I uh, can’t. But thank you.”

Hannibal nodded and brought his hands together in front of him. “Very well, Will. You are welcome here any time, my door is always open.”

Will nodded awkwardly and left without another word. He walked outside, the bright sun a contrast to the dim candles inside. He took a deep breath to calm his nerves. Why was he so anxious? He went in for clues and context for the murder case, or so he thought. All his planning and preparation had washed out of him, mind and memory completely erased. He had to admit that there was an odd comfort found in the warm glow of candles and stained glass, something he had never felt in any church prior. Words from earlier crawled back to memory, ‘*With the case, or with myself?’*. Jack didn’t answer because it was something he couldn’t, Will had to do that alone. To his surprise, Will found he really was seeking solace for *himself.* But why? What could confession bring him that he couldn’t bring himself?

He walked to his car and sat in the driver’s seat for a while. He felt surprisingly comfortable around Hannibal; he was oddly charming. *Maybe all priests are like that, maybe they have to be...* He wondered if he would ever come back. *And would it be for the case… or for me?* There was a lot Will could confess, and as far as he knew, priests couldn’t legally condemn you for what you say. Will hadn’t committed a crime egregious enough to worry about, technically, he was allowed to carry a gun and it was within his rights to use it. He didn’t get in trouble for killing Hobbs or riddling him with bullets. But the thoughts that came after could get him in trouble, or at the very least judged. Will usually thought it best to keep what plagued him locked away. Part of him hoped this new encounter wouldn’t destroy all the walls he meticulously crafted to protect himself. What good has letting in a stranger ever done? This wouldn’t be any different. Hannibal would be just like everyone else.

Hannibal watched as a face he had never seen but felt he would always remember entered his church, body stiff and eyes scanning frantically. There was a worry in his face, a plea for sleep under his eyes. Despite every candle that surrounded them, Hannibal felt like a moth to

this new flame. Hannibal had never been so intrigued so quickly with another person. A frightened mess of a man, nothing out of the ordinary on the surface. But Hannibal knew, at first thought, Will wasn't ordinary. There was a darkness in him, what it was, Hannibal didn't know, one he hoped he could tap into. He could smell latex and sweat on him, and even the robes and soap from the deceased priest. He wondered if Will came there to investigate or question him, or if confession is what he truly sought. Whatever he came in for, he left without achieving it. Hannibal prayed Will would come back and see him, for he knew they had much to discuss.

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Will found himself back in the church parking lot. He had ruminated for a long time before returning, but there was an undeniable pull he couldn't quite shake. He waited until dark, hoping not only that other people wouldn't be there, but maybe it would be late enough the priest would have gone to bed, any excuse to leave to familiarity. He was pleased to see he was the only car in the lot, and he walked around just to make sure no others were hidden in the shadows. He walked up to the door and his hand shook above the handle. He pushed onward, his feet and legs thinking for him, carrying him where his subconscious thought he ought to be. He hoped the church would be empty and lifeless, but he saw Hannibal lighting candles. The glow illuminated massive paintings, ones he hadn't seen when he first came. Will stood quiet, wondering if he should turn around and disappear, but before he could turn to leave, he heard the familiar voice call to him.

"Have you finally come to confess?" Hannibal didn't look back at him, but he knew Will was still there. He finally turned around adorning the same smile.

Will nodded, hands shoved deep in his pockets. "I'm not sure."

Hannibal walked over to him and looked at him up and down. "Follow me, Will." He gestured toward the confession booth.

Will sneered, hesitant and stubborn. He didn't believe confession could or would do anything for him. It was just free therapy under God's veil. He watched Hannibal enter the booth, and then followed suit, entering the other side. He sat on the wooden bench, tugging on the fraying rope pretending to be a handle, trying to keep the door shut. He was annoyed that he decided to return but thought it best to just play along. *I don't need to come back after this.*

"How long has it been since your last confession, Will?" Hannibal followed the script but sounded amused, not bored like Will expected.

Will clicked his tongue, trying to keep his annoyance out of his voice. "I've never confessed."

"If not in church, have you expressed your thoughts anywhere else? Therapy, perhaps?" Hannibal paused, letting Will answer.

"No. Therapy does nothing for me, nothing to be gained." Will spoke through a groan, rolling his eyes.

Hannibal paused, shifting his weight to sit more comfortably. “I can sense a darkness in you, Will.” He felt no need to take it slow and meandering, not with Will at least. There was an impatience shared between them.

“Excuse me?” Will was taken aback; what could this stranger possibly know about him?

Hannibal spoke as if he could read Will’s mind. “I can assure you that any dark thoughts revealed here will not leave the confines of this booth. Your secrets, regardless of weight, are safe with me.” He paused, and Will could almost hear a *smile* in his tone. “We all have secrets, Will. And we all have darkness. There is no need to hide from them or face them alone. Peace can be made by confronting them, and I’d be more than happy to guide you.”

“I…” Will’s voice caught on his teeth. “I’ve never had faith, Hannibal. In God or anything.”

Hannibal breathed in slowly, speaking calmly. “Can I ask what brought you here, then?”

Will thought about the question in earnest. He had one reason to be here, but that didn’t prove to be genuine, just a cover for something more. His mouth parted and words were effortlessly coaxed out. “I can’t sleep. When I do, all I see is nightmares. I don’t trust therapists, so I can’t get meds to help me sleep… I know I need help, I just… Maybe I am grasping at straws by being here. Maybe this is a last-ditch effort, I don’t know.” He sighed heavily; shoulders pulled down by the weight of what he had said. He hadn’t even told Jack about his sleep, not in any detail at least. Yet here he was, separated by a veil, speaking to a complete stranger.

Hannibal didn’t speak right away, letting that truth hang in the air. “What do you see in your nightmares, Will? What keeps you up night after night?”

Will sighed heavily. “I work for the FBI solving murders. I can get inside the killer’s head and it… it sticks with me. Their thoughts and feelings. I can’t help but understand the most vile and cruel minds this planet has to offer.”

“Your empathy is a gift and a hindrance.” He took a deep breath and kept his voice low. "The mirrors in your mind can only reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else."

Will paused, ruminating on what Hannibal had said. He understood, but it didn’t explain his own desire to take life, not under the guise or influence of a serial killer. “There’s this case I had today… a murdered priest. For the first time I couldn’t really *see* inside this killer, through their eyes. Normally, it’s straightforward. But this person is closed off somehow. Maybe they’re an expert, maybe they put extra effort in staying unseen, I don’t know… Everything about it was different.”

“And that difference makes you unsettled.” Hannibal’s heart began to race, more out of excitement than fear. “What about this case was so different from others prior?”

Will chuckled, then swallowed back the laugh. “I’m going to sound crazy explaining it…”

“Your thoughts, all of them, are welcome here. Nothing you say will leave the sanctity of this space, that is my promise to you, Will.” Hannibal felt the need to reassure Will, and he was

desperate to hear what Will had to say about the murder he committed, completely unfiltered.

Will let out a sigh, and the wood beneath him creaked as he adjusted his legs. “This crime scene was… *art.* I have never seen anything like it. All murders have a story, but this was a performance. Intentional, specific, clean, practiced. And I wouldn’t say I *enjoyed* it but… I didn’t feel disgusted looking at it.”

“But something is still making you feel disgusted. Do you know what that is?” Hannibal fought hard to keep his voice neutral, not show too much enthusiasm, afraid to reveal himself or scare Will away.

“I feel disgusted that I wasn’t disgusted. That I saw something beautiful in it. That I saw art in murder scene, something calming in a corpse.” Will struggled to confess that, something so benign; he wondered how hard any other confessions would be.

“What else?” Hannibal asked, straight to the point.

Will scoffed. “What do you mean ‘what else’?”

He sounded nearly offended. It didn’t stop Hannibal from pushing. “There’s more underneath it all, and you’re hiding from it.” *Dig it out.*

“I -” Will was caught off guard. His heart pounded inside his chest; he knew exactly what he wanted to say, but he had choked it back for so long. *Say it, Will. Say it.* “I feel disgusted because… that killer *enjoyed* killing that priest. And I *get it.* Because I… I killed someone. And I enjoyed it.”

Hannibal fought back a smile. “Killing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?” Hannibal wanted to reach through the mesh and wood that divided them, gouge through every layer that separated them.

Will couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Not an ounce or a trace of contempt or judgment or scorn. And *acceptance*? Excused for crime through God, not berated because of him?

Hannibal kept speaking, still struggling to quell his excitement. “God's terrific. He dropped a church roof on thirty-four of his worshippers last Wednesday night in Texas while they sang at him.”

Will’s voice trembled. “Did… did God feel good about that?” *Did he enjoy killing them?*

Hannibal smiled, a bright light bursting and burning within him. “He felt powerful.” He took in an audible breath and spoke again. “Did *you* feel powerful, Will?”

“Y-yes,” Will croaked. He hadn’t thought of it that way, but it was true. He felt powerful.

“Do you think your killer killed the priest to feel powerful?” Hannibal wanted to cut a little deeper; how similar was he to this stranger? How much blood and sin was shared between them?

Will smiled and was thankful Hannibal couldn't see him. "I think they felt as powerful as God. Killing brings them closer to God than prayer ever could. Action holds more weight than mere thought and floating words. And they'll keep killing until they reach true divinity."

The confession quickly petered out. There was a marked lightness in Will's voice by the end; he found a comfort he didn't think was possible. Hannibal didn't want to keep pushing, both for Will's sake and his own. For now, Will was none the wiser that it was Hannibal who killed the priest, and Hannibal was comfortable with that air of mystery. He had tapped into the darkness within Will, relieving a pressure that had been pent up and pushed against nerves and ribs for a long time. He hoped Will would keep himself uncorked, let whatever else needed to breathe out into the space between them. To inhale it all with new lungs, new perspective, or simply let it dissipate and disappear; whatever Will needed, Hannibal wanted to help. When silence fell between them, Hannibal bid Will a good night and escorted him from the church. He hoped a friendly smile and warm hand on his shoulder would be enough indication that he wanted Will to come back and do so soon. Will was much too interesting a patron to let slip through his fingers.

Will slept better that night than he had in months. He drove home after confession, fed his dogs and himself, and was asleep within minutes of laying down. He didn't even dream. He woke up to the sun spearing through his blinds, gently warming the room. His body wasn't tired, his mind wasn't exhausted. He felt better, and he had forgotten what 'better' felt like. *Maybe confession isn't so bad for me…* Will could never quite calm his mind; even with whiskey or the quiet of the stream, there was at least some static. Some unnerving, unrelenting sound plucking at strings he wanted silenced. However, Hannibal brought calm and quiet with him that surprised Will. He couldn't understand how or why a stranger could bring peace to the hidden recesses of his mind, places even he hesitated to reach. Whether the quiet was brought on by finally getting a demon off his chest or by Hannibal's mere presence alone, Will couldn't say, nor did he wish to find out.

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Will didn't go back to the church for a while, at least not until the nightmares came back. He worked on the priest murder case, finding himself nowhere nearer a solution. Still, every glance at the body, every recreation of the scene, brought him an uncomfortable calm. He'd told Jack it was getting harder and harder to make himself look, but deep down Will knew this case was the exception. A work of art amongst the ruins. The sentiment singed the end of his nerves, but he knew *that* wasn't why he was having nightmares.

He knew those nightmares well, having haunted him for weeks and months. They bounced between the murder of the week, the vivid recreation of the victim's demise, to Garrett Jacob Hobbs' kitchen. Unloading his pistol into the chest of a killer felt good, *too* good. It was natural to feel relief from taking down a criminal, but Hobbs was different. There was a sick joy to it, while it was happening, even after. Will could have incapacitated him and let the court system give its due diligence. Snuffing him out felt just, felt right. The part that gave Will nightmares wasn't the shooting or killing him, but how good it all felt. How *powerful* he was.

What else was there to plague him? What other guilt wrestled in his skull, keeping him from rest? With more novel guilts absolved away, old ones crept up back to the surface, ones he hadn't thought of in a long time. He thought maybe it was his *proclivities,* another part of himself he refused to explore. There was nothing stopping him from indulging. He was no longer a bullied child in the deep south; he had new freedom. He admonished the idea that it was still the fear of God and his wrath that stopped him from enjoying the pleasures of adult life. What other reasons were there? Fear of touch, commitment? The horror of being *seen,* but not accepted and loved? Even if he got over that fear, he could never find someone to accept the darkness in him, the darkness Hannibal so bluntly pointed out. But Hannibal was right. He wasn't sure exactly why these new nightmares surfaced, but he knew who could pull it out of him. *But maybe I need to handle this myself…*

He checked himself into a hotel for the night, hoping a new scenery would help quiet his mind. A bed that didn't smell of old sweat and fear, and with different shadows dancing in the corner. The room was plain, a bit clinical, but it was what he wanted. He didn't want anything too homey or comforting. He wanted it to feel strange and foreign, something different to occupy his mind enough to keep out of his own head. He showered, and then nestled into bed, hoping for at least a few hours of sleep, even if interrupted. If this worked, he could afford a night somewhere once or twice a week to keep his head just above water and keep whatever plagued him off his back.

Will wasn't a stranger to sleep walking, though it hadn't happened in quite some time. Even through the worst of the last few months, he always managed to stay in bed, or at the very least his own house. Maybe because it *wasn't* his bed, and it *wasn't* his house… but Will awoke in the dead of night and found himself on the stairsteps of a church. Not just any church; it was the only church he ever dared step foot inside in decades. He could only theorize what drew him here of all places. *I came here and confessed and finally slept… my body knew what it needed and took me back.*

Consciousness was jarring, brought on by the cool night air kissing his cheeks. His eyes adjusted to the faintly flickering streetlights. *Fuck…* He was barefoot and his feet hurt. He was glad he at least slept in a shirt and underwear, but a taxi wouldn't take him as he looked. He didn't even have his wallet or phone on him. The hotel was nearby, but he wasn't sure just how far he walked. And no wallet meant no room key, and he dreaded having to talk to the front desk looking as he did. Wind nipped his skin and he shivered; he didn't dare walk into the church. Not as he was, anyway. He knew how it all looked; unstable and lost. *Pathetic, lonely.* As he turned to walk away, knees stiff from the cold, he heard the heavy church doors open behind him. *Shit.*

"Will? Is that you?" Hannibal's voice was worried but warm, heating up Will's frigid skin. Will was glad it wasn't a parishioner.

Will fought to keep his teeth from chattering, not wanting to worsen whatever perception Hannibal currently had of him. "Sorry Hannibal, I-"

"What's happened? Are you alright?" He looked Will up and down and shook his head. "You're without shoes and proper clothes, please come in Will."

Will tried to resist the offer, shrugging and pretending all was fine. “I don’t want to disturb you, Hannibal. It’s late.” He knew nothing he said could deter Hannibal, but he had to try.

Hannibal put a hand on Will’s shoulder, sliding it down to the small of his back, and ushered him inside. His palm imbued warmth through the thin fabric of his shirt. “Nonsense, come inside.” Hannibal peered outside, not seeing a single car in the lot. He closed the door and had Will sit and rest on the nearest bench. He came back with some clothes and a thick, heavy blanket. He knelt to put wool socks on Will’s feet. Will was much too tired to keep fighting; he’d deal with whatever residual embarrassment bubbled up from this later.

Hannibal looked up at Will and spoke softly. “I didn’t see your car.”

Will nodded, he couldn’t lie. *Shouldn’t* lie. “No, I uhm, I walked here.” He was surprised Hannibal knew what car he drove.

“You’re lucky you didn’t freeze. How far did you walk, and why without shoes?” He got up and sat next to Will, concern painting his brow.

Will sighed heavily and bit his lip. “Because I… I sleepwalked.” He turned to Hannibal; a fake smile spread across his face.

Hannibal put a hand on Will’s shoulder and squeezed lightly. “So, your nightmares haven’t gotten any better, have they? I hadn’t seen you for a while, and hoped your confession gave you some lasting peace.”

Will shook his head, pulling the blanket tighter around himself, *hiding*. “It did help. They disappeared for a little while, at least. But, uh, they came back. I tried a hotel to see if it would help my sleep.”

“Hmm,” Hannibal pondered aloud. “Would another confession help bring you more permanent rest?”

Will laughed nervously and shook his head. “No, thank you. I couldn’t, especially knowing people will be here for service soon.” He wasn’t ready to carve himself open and spill what lurked inside.

“It’s 3 in the morning, Will. The earliest anyone arrives on a Sunday, or any day, is 10. Maybe 9:30 if Mrs. Tilner had too much coffee that morning.” The anecdote made Will laugh, and Hannibal smiled. “So, you have all the time that you need.”

Will thought about it for a moment longer then shook his head again. “Not today, Hannibal. Thank you. Maybe some other time.”

Hannibal nodded. “Very well. I’ll call you a cab. Can I offer you some coffee? I have my own private stash, much better than the mud they offer during service.”

Will smiled weakly and sighed. “I’ll owe you for the cab, but no coffee for me. I think I’ve disturbed your evening – er – morning too much already. Sorry for showing up so late, I hope you didn’t lose sleep.” Will shirked the blanket and brought it into his lap to fold.

“My church, my home, is always welcome to friends and those in need.” He smiled, and Will smiled back, more genuinely this time. “I’ll be right back, let me call that cab for you.”

The cab came quicker than Will wanted. He didn’t want to be there when others showed up for service, but he didn’t want to be alone either. He promised Hannibal he’d return the clothes after he could wash them, but Hannibal insisted it was no problem at all. After being dropped off at the hotel, he caught a few more hours of sleep, and then drove home. He felt oddly at ease given how embarrassed he felt earlier. Hannibal’s kindness was genuine, and his warmth melted away and anxiety. His words encircled Will’s head as his eyes grew heavy. *My church, my home, are always welcome to friends and those in need*. Will couldn’t help but wonder if he was closer to “friend” or “those in need”. *Perhaps both. Maybe it doesn’t matter.*

Chapter End Notes

WOO! long awaited priest fic is here! thank you everyone who read the first chapter! i promise it gets smutty real soon, real fast just stay tuned <333

Hallow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A few more sleepless nights and a morning of finding himself having sleepwalked onto his own roof, only woken by the whines of his dogs, sent Will back to Hannibal's doorstep. As always, he waited for the sun to set and all the cars to leave the lot. Whatever Hannibal could yank out of him, Will was determined that it truly stayed between them. He still wasn't sure if it was better to knock or walk in but decided on the latter. If he knocked and had to wait, it gave him more time to change his mind and leave. He found Hannibal lighting the candles again. Will closed the door behind him but couldn't find a voice to speak first, finding pleasure in simply watching Hannibal go through his nightly routine.

"Glad to see you again, Will. I hope under better circumstances than last time." He blew out the long match in his hand and walked towards Will, head held high and hands folded in front of him.

"I've come back for confession, I think." Will smiled weakly, taking off his jacket and draping it over his arms.

"You think or you know?" Hannibal smiled back and gestured for Will to put his coat on a nearby pew. "Another attempt to quiet the mind."

Will nodded. "I suppose so. Doesn't hurt to try."

Hannibal walked towards the booth slowly, making sure Will wasn't too far behind him. "It never hurts to try, Will. Come sit."

The booth was the same; same marks in the wood, same heavy door that didn't close, but it all felt different. Maybe it was what was on his mind, or that it was familiar unlike last time. He chuckled, knowing now what to say, but the words felt silly and foreign in his mouth. "It's been… a few weeks since my last confession."

Hannibal chuckled. "There is no need for this to be so formal, Will. We know where your faith lies. And it isn't in the mundane routine of religion. It's just you and me here. Speak honestly; there are no rules for your confessions, not with me."

Will nodded, and the weight of all he wanted to say crashed around him. His hands shook, and he flexed his fists to relieve the tension. Apprehension nibbled at his seams, threatening to break him open before he was ready. Why did he feel any guilt to begin with? And why was he seeking solace from a stranger in a *church* of all places? *A stranger who seems to care, at least. Understanding more than anyone else.* He heard Hannibal gently call his name, which for a moment brought his head back above water. "Yeah, sorry, I just… trying to find the right words, I guess."

“Take your time, Will. Take all the time you need.” Hannibal’s voice was soft and inviting, encouraging Will to speak openly.

Will went on to explain why he came back. His *attractions,* a fear he couldn’t let go of, tethered to him his entire life, an anchor in his chest. His voice shook, emotion hidden behind pauses and gently slammed fists. How ashamed he’d been made to feel, perpetuated only by himself. No one was stopping him or hurting him anymore; but the guilt still lingered. It stopped him from having any long-term, deep relationships. He couldn’t help but feel a pit in his stomach and pain in his heart before he could even say “I love you”. Sadness turned to anger, confusion, and frustration as to why he would even begin telling all this to a priest in a place that didn’t want him as he was.

Hannibal could tell this was harder than his first confession. Love for another is more difficult to swallow than enjoying death and the power causing it provides. One was finite, while the other was all-encompassing. It was harder to accept something good, for it required feeling like one truly deserved it. When Will stopped talking, Hannibal let a small silence fall between them. He wanted Will to feel heard and understood. He took a deep breath before speaking. “How others have perverted the holy text is often unforgivable. Fears of the mortal man have corrupted and harmed so many souls. God created man, and intentionally left room for man to define himself. God would rather you love who you want than not love anyone at all, or worse yet, hate another for their love.”

Hannibal heard Will sigh and put his head back against the wall. With no response, Hannibal kept talking. “God made this world for us, *all* of us to enjoy, all its fruits, all his labor. You aren’t wrong for who you are, Will. There is no sin in what you desire.”

Will groaned, feeling placated like a child. He’d spent decades of his life angry and hiding; such a simple forgiveness annoyed him. If it was that easy, why couldn’t he have done it sooner? Why did he even need Hannibal at all? He spoke through a snarl. “What is the point of confession anyway? What does it even do? Aren’t you supposed to absolve sin or tell me to say ‘hail mary’, not redefine sin and make it seem like I had nothing to be guilty of in the first place? Aren’t you supposed to tell me what to do? To make this feeling go away?”

“Is that what you want, Will? Is that why you are here?” Hannibal kept his voice calm so as to not escalate Will’s anger. He understood Will’s frustrations, giving him the space to let them spill out of him.

“*Yes*! Why else would I be here? I don’t believe in God. I just… I came here to confess. Separate myself from thoughts I can’t shake. To get more sleep. To be forgiven and be told how to fix my fucking miserable little life.” Will breathed in deep, letting it out through clenched teeth.

Hannibal paused until Will caught his breath, being careful that Will heard everything he had to say. “You already know what you want out of life, and an idea on how to fix it if not for your fear. You knew before you came here that who you love isn’t something treacherous and evil, just a fact of your life. You coming here was not a confession, but an avenue with which to accept yourself.” He licked his lips.

“I accept you, Will, as you are and as you will be. God accepts you. But is that the acceptance you crave? You wouldn’t have told me any of this if you had any doubt in your mind I’d reject you. You wanted my words, my acceptance, to encompass your own, so I could do the heavy lifting for you.” Hannibal clicked his tongue, almost disappointed Will wasn’t answering him, even though Hannibal already knew the answer. “No, what you need is to be *told* to accept yourself. *That’s* why you came here.” *Instructed. Commanded.*

Hannibal softly sighed and spoke in a tone Will had yet to hear. It was sharp and demanding. “Do you really want to be told what to do, Will?” He was only met with silence. He licked his teeth and cleared his throat, speaking through a devilish grin. “Kneel.”

Will scoffed, confused and almost *insulted.* Hannibal had it right, but Will didn’t want to admit that. And he surely wouldn’t get on his knees. “You can’t be serious, I-”

“*Kneel.*” Hannibal’s voice was deep and thundering, and it rattled through Will’s chest. His voice softened, but his tone was still just as serious. “Forget all other thoughts, all your worries. Do as you’re told and just kneel.”

Will’s heart began to race. A restlessness boiled up from the long bones of his limbs, begging to follow an order his mind was still processing. *Forget all other thoughts, all your worries. Do as you’re told and just kneel.* The words ricocheted in his skull, settling down in a pool of heat and want. All thoughts besides the sound of Hannibal’s voice melted away, and without more protest, he got on his knees. He let out a relaxed sigh and folded his hands in his lap, patiently waiting for what else Hannibal would say next. His pulse beat in his ears, loud enough he didn’t hear the door open. It felt like he barely blinked, and then Hannibal was standing in front of him, towering over his folded frame, the warm, flickering glow of candles illuminating behind him. Will looked up and let out a trembling sigh, swallowing doubt into the pit of his stomach.

Hannibal reached forward, running his fingers through Will’s curls. “Hush now and listen.” He gently put fingers over Will’s eyes to close them. He cupped Will’s face in his palm and rubbed a thumb over his cheek. “Do you trust me, Will?”

In any other circumstance, the question was loaded; a near stranger asking for his trust. But Will couldn’t ignore the blanket of calm that was enveloping him. The warmth of Hannibal’s words coddled him, settling the anxious nerves under his skin. Not even in his sleep was his mind ever truly at rest… until now. Hannibal heard his deepest fears, something no one else ever had, and welcomed it, comforted him. Hannibal opened the palm of his handles and cradled every word Will had to say. He could have closed his fist and crushed them all, obliterating Will with them, but he didn’t. He made Will feel safe, both where he was and within himself. With a breathy sigh, he said, “Yes,” and the word floated off his tongue with ease.

Hannibal bent over and whispered into Will’s ear, and Will leaned his head into Hannibal’s hand, feeling hot breath of promise against his neck. “Then trust that I will take care of you, that God will take care of you through me. Trust all the worldly pleasures God has created for you, all that he offers.”

Will felt himself melt and lose a bit of the control he had so desperately clung to all his life. A bit of panic crawled up his spine, unable to be silenced. “Hannibal, I-”

“Shhh, don’t worry, dear Will. Clear your mind.” Hannibal rubbed a gentle thumb between Will’s brows, smoothing the lines of worry. “Let me take on the burden of your fears, your sins, and dissolve all doubt.”

Hannibal pulled away to stand over Will again whose eyes were still closed. *So well behaved.* He put a thumb on Will’s chin, gently opening his mouth. “Accept yourself, accept love and pleasure. Let no guilt settle in your heart, for I absolve all your sins.”

He probed Will’s mouth with greedy, curious fingers, dragging fingertips across sharp crowns; Will couldn’t help but moan. To be invaded, *explored.* “Pleasure can be felt and tasted and enjoyed. God gave us mouths for a reason; he gave us teeth to chew and swallow and sate ourselves, and tongues to taste.”

Hannibal leaned over to kiss Will on his forehead, and he felt drool drip down his fingers, trailing towards his wrist. He couldn’t help but smile. “No better way to honor God’s gifts than to use the tools given to us since the very beginning.” Hannibal stifled a moan as the words slipped over his tongue. All the talk of devouring and tasting made his own saliva pool behind his teeth. He swallowed, and he noticed how hard he was; something another person hadn’t inspired in a long time. He wanted it, wanted Will, wanted *all* of it. Still, he knew this was against the promises of priesthood, but Hannibal was known to imbibe and follow his own rules. What was the point of life if not to enjoy it? Besides, what lesson would he be teaching Will if he forbade them both? Denied them both the pleasures of this life? Pulled the rug out from under him with rejection after coddling and cooing how grand pleasure could truly be? With his free hand, he coaxed out his cock, stroking it gently, feeling his pulse fill him. He pulled his fingers out of Will’s mouth and gently demanded, “Look at me, Will,” while opening his lax mouth by tugging on his jaw.

Will flickered his eyes open, doe-like and dilated. His lids were heavy, but his gaze was focused, no other thought on his mind other than the caress of Hannibal’s voice, reaching into him and pulling out hidden pleasures. Hannibal put a hand on his cheek, pressing the head of his cock against Will’s plump lower lip, then slowly sliding his cock into his open, hungry mouth. Will didn’t protest for even a moment, widening his jaw, making himself pliable, accepting all Hannibal would give him. “You are so good, Will. God wants you to seek pleasure, he wants you to accept all your desires.”

Hannibal held still in Will’s mouth just short of hitting his throat, sacrificing complete envelopment for Will’s comfort. This was as much about Will’s pleasure as it was Hannibal’s. He bathed in the warmth of his twitching tongue and growing pool of saliva, the gentle hum of a beg pleading for more. Hannibal started to gently fuck Will’s mouth, rubbing his cheek and petting his hair, and moans slipped up Will’s throat and kissed the tip of Hannibal’s cock. Will stayed open, drool still falling down his chin. He tried to keep his heavy-lidded eyes open to look up at Hannibal, be good and do as he was asked. He was given simple tasks, *clear your mind and look at me, Will.* Hannibal smiled at him and spoke softly. “I absolve you, Will, for all your transgressions.”

Will's mouth felt *good*, warm, and compliant. The orange glow of the candles around them highlighted the deep flush in Will's cheeks, making Hannibal weak in the knees. It was so tempting to melt where he stood, let himself be entirely devoured and savored by the man in front of him, sitting so still and patiently on his knees as he was asked. "You're beautiful, Will. God's gift and treasure."

Hannibal fucked him a little harder, gently grabbing the curls near his temple, Will taking the entirety of his cock in the hollow of his cheeks, taking every inch. He started to choke but didn't pull back or away. He stayed on his knees, hands folded in his lap, so good, so patient. Hannibal's cock kissed the back of Will's throat and soft, small tears rolled down his face. Hannibal wiped them away with his thumb, bringing the salt to his tongue. *Pleasure can be felt and tasted and enjoyed*. Hannibal was gracious that he finally got a taste of Will, just a little, just enough to quell the hunger roiling deep within him. He moaned and grabbed Will by larger fistfuls of his hair, picking up speed; he felt himself draw close, a heat licking up his spine. Will felt such peace, being told what to do, indulging in repressed desires. In a safe place, in hands that would protect him.

Hannibal petted Will's cheek as he came deep into his throat, fully seated against his lips, his cock twitching against his warm tongue. He rubbed his ear as he praised him, giving Will the freedom to pull away and take a proper breath. He didn't; he stayed right where he was, accepting as much of Hannibal into him as he could, swallowing everything Hannibal gave him. Hannibal slowly pulled out, wishing to linger inside Will as long as he could, and a string of spit followed, keeping them connected. He knelt with Will, softly wiping his face and chin on his sleeve. He held Will's jaw, rubbing the strained muscle, and Will gently nodded. The fear behind his eyes dissolved, the tremble in his hands melted. Hannibal had given him exactly what he asked for, a sense of peace and purpose. Hannibal pulled Will into a kiss, and Will eagerly leaned in, reaching a hand up to bring Hannibal closer.

Hannibal pulled away, breathy and buzzing. He whispered, "If God didn't want this for us, for *you,* then why did it feel this good?"

Will moaned as he felt Hannibal's lips brush the shell of his ear, a shaking whisper passed through him. Hannibal smiled at Will, still cupping his face in his hand. He pushed their foreheads together, letting his free hand gently explore, happy to find Will hard under his touch, nearly begging. He was accepting pleasure and no longer hiding from it. Hannibal pulled Will into a slow kiss as he palmed Will's thick, aching cock through his pants. Will stuttered moans into Hannibal's mouth and he drank them in. Will started to buck and whine, quieting himself with rough kisses. Hannibal pulled away, wanting to hear him; every high-pitched whimper and broken groan. Will buried his face into Hannibal as he held the back of Will's neck. He played with Will's hair and cooed softly at him as he came hard in his hand, bucking and writhing under him, still separated by layers of fabric. Hannibal could feel a wet warmth bloom, almost upset he couldn't taste him or feel him properly, truly indulge in him as he knew they both desired.

Hannibal held Will close with both arms as he collapsed into him, exhausted and trembling. He rubbed his back and kissed the crown of his head, humming softly. When Will's breath slowed, he pulled away and his eyes fluttered; Hannibal could nearly make out the gentle upward tug on the corners of his mouth. Hannibal kissed his forehead, lingering as long as he

could, the salt of Will's sweat was almost as sweet as his tears. Hannibal helped him to his feet, and he was shaky but stable. No words were exchanged, just pleasant, peaceful glances. They kissed once more, and Will grabbed his coat. He passed one last look at Hannibal and smiled before leaving the church, careful not to slam the heavy wooden doors behind him.

Hannibal bid Will a good night and restful sleep, and he watched Will leave praying beyond all hope that he could stay. A gentle choir filled the church as Will left, drowning out his heavy footsteps. As soon as the doors shut, the reality of what transpired quickly rained down. It didn't feel *real*. He hadn't been intimate with someone in a long time, he wasn't *supposed* to. That much care and devotion and attention was to be only reserved for God. The only evidence he had that Will was there and that everything truly happened was the lingering musk on his fingers and salt on his lips. He brought his fingers to his nose and breathed in deeply, taking in every ounce of Will that he could. Will smelled good, he felt good, irresistible… Hannibal's knees started to buckle, and he found purchase on a pew. He thought he was helping Will unwind, but it was *him* that was unraveling. He looked up and found an elaborate painting of God staring down at him. *He saw everything.* For the first time in a long time, Hannibal's faith started to falter. *He saw everything but stopped nothing…* A little chip in the once pristine marble foundation. How did Will get under his robe, his *skin,* and make him feel better than God ever had, ever could? One simple man uprooting everything he had worked towards and desired, why was Hannibal okay with that? More than okay, he wanted *more.*

When others sinned, they could go to a priest and confess, a mortal man granting them absolution and forgiveness. When a priest sinned, however, he had no one to turn to, no fellow human to lessen the blow. He had to face his penance alone, speaking to God and asking for forgiveness directly. Hannibal wasn't usually one to kneel and pray and beg; like with everything else, he took matters into his own hands. He thought himself better than his fellow man, even his fellow priest; he didn't need to take care of his own sin as they did.

He pulled out his rosary, slowly moving the beads between his fingers. He forgot how much of Will was still on his skin, but he didn't care. He did, however, wonder if any of him would be imbued into the polished, dark red wood. *Something to keep with me.* He held the cross in his hand, one of a kind. The long end was meticulously sharpened to a point; it had had its fair share of penance, having tasted Hannibal more than once. He stared at the silver shine in his palm and his thoughts raced. *How did Will affect me so quickly, effortlessly? I accepted him and he accepted me but… could he ever accept <u>all</u> of me? He knows what I have told him, but what of the rest? What secret will finally break him?*

Hannibal gripped the cross tight in his hand, holding his fist to his lips, whispering a prayer through his fingers. He held it there until blood trickled down his wrist in a small, dark line. He opened his palm and stared at the mess. His eyes danced between all the small, white scars surrounding the fresh wound. He'd done this before; he could recall every instance but refused to count. None felt more important than this one, for Hannibal wasn't sure he could undo what had been done; he wasn't sure he *wanted* to. He wanted to take Will wherever he'd let him and follow Will wherever he went. Without trying, Will had seeded himself into Hannibal's flesh, and Hannibal wondered how long until he was overgrown, in full bloom; roots connecting to nerves, branches surrounding tendon. He stood and walked the perimeter of the church, snuffing out the flames with his fingers one by one. He took one candle with

him to bed to guide him through the darkness of the church. Normally, he'd tend to his wound, careful to keep his cleansing truly clean. But not tonight. He wanted the smell of copper to linger and burn into his nose, ground him, and remind him of everything that happened. Blood and musk mixed for a sweet elixir of sleep. The wound was still weeping as he settled into bed, and he held his hand above the final candle's flame, using sluggish drops of blood to extinguish the light.

Despite it all, the throb in his hand, a guilt settling into his bones, Hannibal still felt undeniably good. He could still feel the caress of Will on his cock, the welcoming warmth. Maybe it was that feeling that truly solidified the guilt. He didn't regret what happened with Will, and hoped Will felt similarly. *If he returns… then he felt fondly of it all. Of me.* Hannibal closed his eyes, hoping Will could finally find the peace he needed to finally rest.

Will went home, his mind and body buzzing the entire drive. He was almost glad the commute was long so he could bathe in the tingling of his flesh for as long as possible; he was worried being home would cut the sensation short. He got out of his car and was thankful he left the door unlocked for his hands were too shaky to properly put a key into the lock. He greeted and fed his dogs, letting them out for some exercise before calling them back in. Will knew he needed to shower but hesitated; he didn't want the remnants of Hannibal's touch to wash down the drain. He sighed as he hesitantly stepped into the hot water. The warmth only amplified the sensation of Hannibal's fingers against his skin, the rhythmic patter against his skull recreating the tug on his scalp. He couldn't believe he fucked a priest, well sort of at least. He didn't know if the technicalities of sex really mattered to God. The consequence for Will was negligible at worst, but what of Hannibal? Would he regret what happened? Would he want to even see Will again?

He'd think more about it tomorrow, mind too tired and muddied to process it all. He didn't want to think about it, if he was to be honest with himself. He wanted the good feeling to envelope him and weave its way into his skin. He turned off the water and dried off, heading straight to bed. It didn't take long for him to be asleep, and his final thought was hoping Hannibal would rest well, too.

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Will hesitated to return to the church. He wasn't confident Hannibal wanted him there again after everything that happened. What if he was angry or upset? Will had helped him break sacred vows and promises. He hadn't had any nightmares for a while, restful nights extending longer than after his first confession. Sleeping well and not having nightmares despite it all made him feel a different kind of guilt. His nights were filled with something closer to dreams, brimming with desire and pleasure. They weren't very vivid, but more than once he woke up hard and with Hannibal in mind. He knew this wasn't something he could shake, so he decided to visit the church again; there was no way of knowing how Hannibal felt without talking to him.

He drove on a night without service the next day. The route became routine and stopped feeling as long as it used to, muscle memory guiding him through every turn. As always, he found himself in an empty parking lot. He couldn't shake paranoia and checked he was the only car there, and he was. Needing to be alone was initially for his own selfish need of total

privacy, but now it had become to protect Hannibal, too, for who would fare worse if their affair was discovered? He walked up to the door and quietly walked inside. To his surprise, he found Hannibal sitting in the pews, head tilted down, and hands folded in his lap. If he was praying, Will didn't want to disturb him. *What if he is asking for forgiveness for what happened? I'd be the last person he would want to see.* He decided he'd come back in a little while or on another night entirely, giving Hannibal all the time and space he needed. As he turned to leave, Hannibal called to him.

"Leaving so soon?" Hannibal lifted his head but didn't turn around; he knew it was Will, he'd know him anywhere.

Will cleared his throat. "I saw you praying and didn't want to disrupt. I can come back an-"

"Please, sit. Your presence is most welcome." Hannibal patted the spot next to him and Will walked over, footsteps echoing, then sat down. "Haven't seen you in a while, Will. Have your nightmares improved?"

Will chuckled and nodded. "They have, actually. Even started having more *normal* dreams." He wished he bit back that last part.

Hannibal turned to look at Will, happy to see him and even happier that he looked well. "Oh? What of?"

"Oh, you know, uh…" Will didn't want to admit he was having dreams, *sexual dreams,* of Hannibal, so he deflected. "How has your sleep been?"

Hannibal nodded, deciding not to pry. Will would tell him if he chose to. "Good, though sleep hasn't usually been a problem for me." He paused then spoke again. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your company, then? You only come to confess when your nightmares plague you; seeing as those are quelled for the time being…"

Will licked his lips and smiled. "Perhaps just the pleasure of *your* company." He took a deep breath in, the gentle thoughts of guilt and absolution floating in his mind. "When a priest sins, to whom do they confess? Another priest?"

Hannibal stifled a laugh, wondering how Will so easily wormed his way inside his head time and time again. "No, we confess to God." He looked up to the largest painting in the church, God's gaze looking down on them again. Will looked up, too. Hannibal sighed deeply, a sad tone taking over his voice. "It's very different confessing to a face you cannot see, to a voice you cannot hear. Even the best painting in the world cannot replace an emotive, warm face. It's not as relieving as it used to be. No confirmation of forgiveness, I just… have to trust it's there. Have to believe I understand God well enough to know I am forgiven. Leaves a lot of room for human error and self-doubt."

"When was the last time you confessed, Hannibal? To someone who could talk back to you." Will wondered how far this conversation would go. Could he get as much out of the priest as the priest had gotten out of him? Was the exchange of vulnerabilities equal?

“Not in a very long time. Perhaps as a young adult.” Hannibal dropped his head, uncurling his fingers from his palm, admiring the mark he had given himself, healing faster than he had hoped. “I pursued priesthood as soon as I saw its potential; it’d been between God and me ever since.”

Will stood and took a deep breath, offering a hand to help Hannibal to his feet. “Would you like to confess, Hannibal? To an emotive, warm face?” He smiled gently.

Hannibal smirked and took Will’s hand and stood. “To you?”

Will nodded, smiling wider than before. “Yes. I won’t pretend to be God but it just so happens my schedule is wide open.” He paused and licked his lips. “I heard people don’t even start showing up until 10am, we have all the time in the world.”

Hannibal shook his head and laughed softly. “Not very conventional, is it? A priest confessing to a faithless man?”

“Nothing’s been conventional since I first walked into your parish.” Will smiled again, nodding his head towards the confessional booth.

Hannibal followed him; he hadn’t been on that side of the veil in a long time. He settled into the seat, smoothing out his robe over his legs. “Where should I begin, *Father Graham*?”

“Please, spare me,” Will scoffed then softened his voice. “You can start wherever you want. Nothing you say leaves this booth.”

Hannibal thought for a while, *really* thought. Will was under no obligation to keep the promise of secrecy. He could pretend the vow would be upkept, but nothing required him to follow through. There was no statute of limitations on Hannibal’s crimes; anything he confessed could be used against him; sending him to prison to rot. Still, he felt an undeniable trust in Will as Will had trusted him, and Hannibal was willing to test the waters. This was his opportunity to see which confession might break him. “I don’t like communion wine, and I often provide my own,” he said as a joke, but an honest truth; any attempt to lighten the space between them.

Will laughed and shook his head. He let the joke hang in the air and let silence fall. “Is that what is *really* bothering you, Hannibal?” He paused for a moment then kept talking, tone more serious and prying than before. “You said you saw darkness in me. The only people who would see those shadows are ones who have their own darkness. So, what darkness are *you* hiding from?”

“I’m not hiding, just preserving thyself. You have all the power in the world to lock me away.” There was the start of a quiver in Hannibal’s voice, a fear he thought he swallowed decades ago.

“I promise, Hannibal. *Nothing* you say here… will leave the confines of this booth.” Will’s parroting didn’t quite puncture through the tension, only rubbed it a bit raw. For what reason did Hannibal have to trust Will? For that matter, what reason did Will have to trust Hannibal?

Hannibal's heart raced and he balled his fists tight. What compelled him to speak, whether it was God or Will, he didn't know, but words flowed from him faster than he could swallow. It was like his very first confession all over again. "I have a criminal past; one I won't pretend that I am not proud of. From as early on as childhood, I've… *indulged* in taking lives." He paused, letting that settle. He has said it before, but never to Will, nor had he expressed it as quite the enjoyment that it was. This was as much of a test as it was confession; could Will truly accept Hannibal as Hannibal had accepted him, truly every part of him?

"I don't have a number for how many have fallen by my hand; I don't plan on counting. Quantity was never the goal, only the purpose of their death mattered." Hannibal had said a lot, but nothing specific enough to truly condemn him. It still didn't settle his nerves, and his palms began to sweat.

Will took a deep breath, oddly not bothered by it all. Afterall, he'd enjoyed killing, too. And when he confessed his joy of killing to Hannibal, Hannibal didn't bat an eye either. *Created in God's image.* "Why do you kill, Hannibal?"

Hannibal inhaled sharply through his nose. "People are rude, undeserving of their gift of life. Why should their ill-nature stain the ground we've been gifted? Take joy and pleasure from those who *are* deserving?" *People like you and me.*

"You kill through the lens of God." *For him, as him. Decide and strike as he would.* The pieces fell together quickly behind his eyes. It all felt so simple and obvious, and he almost couldn't believe how it all strung together. All the answers were so apparent now. Another question lingered hesitantly in his mouth. The one answer that would really make him vulnerable and exposed, in danger if Will sought it. "Did you… did you kill your predecessor?"

Hannibal smiled to himself, both pride and defeat. Will was smart, and it was only a matter of time before he solved it. Will said he couldn't see the killer enough to see his face; now he was buried deep, and the truth was unfolding. He'd gotten under Hannibal's skin, somewhere no one else had managed. He smiled weakly, and shakily whispered, "Yes." There was nothing more to be said. Will already saw his reasons carved out at the crime scene. The 'why' was already known, and now so was 'who'.

Will swallowed hard, the crime scene recreating itself behind his eyes. He never could help seeing it unwind and unfurl when an answer was reached. It made sense even before Hannibal confessed, but now the shadowy figure had a face. A friendly, familiar face. "You cleaned and cared for his body, crucified him… It wasn't an act of malice. So, why did you kill him?"

Hannibal sighed, what more could he try to hide? "I needed a parish, a home." The reason felt petty to say aloud, but it was the truth. He always killed with purpose, this one just happened to be his weakest.

"He wasn't rude or evil, so you didn't spite him. You basically martyred him... I imagine that does wonders for his resume in heaven." He spoke out loud, but it was more for himself than Hannibal. He paused again, remembering more details of the scene. "He was missing organs. What did you do with them?"

Hannibal sucked his teeth, peeling more layers off him, feeling the give of old flesh in his clenched jaw. “I ate him.” Every sound around them seemed to silence, not even the collective flickering of candles or deep breath could be heard. Complete stillness. It was a truth Will already knew, but not a theory he had shared with Hannibal, a gesture he had understood and empathized with. Hannibal then asked a question that made him nervous. “Does that bother you?” He was laid bare, exposed to elements he hadn’t felt lick and chew his skin in so long.

Will leaned back in the booth almost *relaxed.* It all pieced together beautifully; his theories about the killer were right and without even knowing it, it all led him right to the killer’s home, welcomed in his arms. He felt no hesitation in reaching back. “Not at all… It makes sense. God isn’t above killing, and you drink his blood and eat his flesh during service. You just… made it more literal.” He chuckled a bit, crushing the tension into dust. “If we are created in God’s image, why waste what he created?”

Hannibal was taken a bit aback by Will’s acceptance. It was what he wanted, it was the best thing Will could say, but Hannibal had spent so long feeling so alone in his thoughts and rituals, it almost didn’t feel real. With penance seemingly out of reach, he leaned towards self-sabotage. “Is this where you turn me in for my crimes? My obligation is to God's law; yours is to legal justice, the law of man. You have an unsolved case on your hands.” *And the perpetrator wrapped around your finger.*

Will let out an earnest laugh. “No. You are much too interesting to toss behind lock and key. Besides, who will I trust enough to confess too, then? Am I supposed to visit you in prison when I can’t sleep?” He paused and calmed his tone. “Hannibal?”

“Yes Will?” Even the few seconds of anticipation were eating Hannibal alive.

Will cleared his throat, hands restless in his lap. It felt easy to hear, and oddly just as easy to say. “I accept you, Hannibal. As you are and as you will be. God accepts you, too.” It felt odd but *powerful* to say those words back to Hannibal; he understood him better now, and the power those words held. Warmth spread from his throat down into his core, igniting a fire. He knew he wasn’t God, not even close, but to say the words Hannibal desperately needed to hear, and *mean* those words, was not something he thought could feel this good. Hannibal had only confessed to God for so long but found trust and solace in Will, the same that Will felt for him. There was a peace in that reciprocity that words couldn’t quite describe.

I accept you, Hannibal. As you are, as you will be. Those words, his absolution, were beautiful pouring from Will’s mouth, and Hannibal drank it all in. Hannibal didn’t anticipate the weight his own words repeated back to him would hold. The stone in his chest melted away, his muscles relaxed. Will had truly accepted him, *all* of him, as God had. Under his robe, behind the veil, open arms to the man beneath it all, laid naked and vulnerable. His heart fluttered against his ribs, pumping a new life back into him. He heard the door of the confession booth open, and warm light came through when Will opened his door, too. An outstretched hand brought him to his feet.

Will traipsed towards the altar and Hannibal followed, he was curious to see what Will was doing, where his thoughts were wandering after all that had been said. He stood behind the

pulpit, smiling down at Hannibal. He tapped on the top of it, changing his gaze to the pews. “Does being up here make you feel powerful?”

Hannibal smiled, hands neatly folded in front of him, walking closer to Will. He knew Will chose the word ‘powerful’ intentionally. There was no other way to describe it. “Yes, quite.” He paused and continued to explain. “They trust that what I say is truth, that my words bring them closer to the life and afterlife they desperately seek. There is a power in being the final word, for God cannot speak with them directly. They rely on me.”

Will stepped down and stood, hand shoved into his jacket pockets. “So… murder and sermons make you feel powerful.” He cocked a wry smile, wondering the connection between them, and closed the gap between him and Hannibal. “What else makes you feel powerful?” It took every effort to keep his hands seated in his pockets and not reach out to touch Hannibal.

Hannibal pulled Will close to him by the front of his coat, almost as if he read Will’s mind, making the decision for him. He wondered what answer Will was hoping to hear. He smiled, eyes scanning Will’s, watching as his pupils dilated and breathing pick up speed in anticipation. One last confession, a single word, perched under his tongue begging to escape, spoken with a smile. “You.”

The answer was all Will needed; he leaned forward, kissing Hannibal deeply. Hannibal moaned into his mouth, impatiently shirking off Will’s coat. Will didn’t even pretend to understand how to take off Hannibal’s robe and left him to it, focusing instead on the stubborn button of his pants, letting them pool to the floor. Hannibal removed his robe and laid it open on the floor of the altar. Will smiled at seeing Hannibal’s body, unable to stop hungry palms from exploring the flesh. He’d seen inside him, and now all of him, wonderfully complete. He ran fingers through his chest hair and dug his thumbs into his hips. Hannibal pulled Will’s shirt over his head, pulling him in so the warmth of their bodies could mingle, making Will moan. Will could feel Hannibal’s heartbeat reverberate into his own chest, their pulses syncing into rhythm. As one exhaled the other inhaled, their ribs dancing with one another, feeding each other as breath passed between their lips in a kiss.

Hannibal carefully lowered Will to the floor, hardwood cushioned by his robe. Hannibal pressed his body into Will, rubbing his hard cock over Will’s. Will moaned at the sensation of Hannibal slowly thrusting, dragging against him, warm and heavy, their entire lengths meeting and melding. Hannibal pulled himself off Will, looking down to admire him amongst the flicker of candlelight, reflecting warm off his skin. He was beautiful, God’s best creation. He could have never prayed for anything or anyone so precious. He licked his lips and moved down, kissing gently along Will’s chest and stomach. Will’s breath hitched in his chest, watching as Hannibal slithered down him, a primal hunger in his dark eyes. Hannibal’s lips moved to his thighs and tender touch became rough as he bit down hard, making Will whimper and wail. With a mouthful of flesh, he bit and sucked until he knew a purple mark had bloomed. Hannibal pulled away and admired the indents of his teeth, licking the marks his crowns left behind. He slowly continued upward, leaving dark marks on Will’s lower abdomen and upper chest, finishing off by sinking his teeth into the pulse of his neck. Will’s whimpers devolved into guttural moans, writhing under Hannibal’s bite, feeling his own heartbeat pinched between ravenous jaws.

Hannibal pulled away, admiring the constellation of bruises left on the flesh beneath him. He looked up to find St. Sebastian, his most cherished saint, towering above them, Will's mottled and marred marks inspired by pierced arrows into flesh. Hannibal felt an agonizing throb in his groin begging for more than a mouth. He reached behind Will, anointing oil just in reach; the irony of its use was not lost on Hannibal. *To hallow, to sanctify, to make divine.* He spread Will's legs, trying not to get lost in his blissful gaze, long lashes fluttering and flirting. He coated his fingers, slowly sliding them over Will's hole, making him shiver and curl his toes. He wiped the excess that dripped down his wrist with his other thumb. He reached up and rubbed his thumb on Will's forehead, a near baptism. He cupped Will's face and kissed his forehead as he slid a finger inside, the warmth swallowing him to the hilt. Will pushed back against him and Hannibal added another finger, reaching in deep to bless the begging bundle of nerves inside, exchanging one blessing for another. Hannibal petted Will's face and rubbed his fingers through his soft curls as he fingerfucked him, steady and agonizing. Will swore under his breath, rocking against Hannibal's wrist, white knuckling the robe beneath him. A final finger was added with ease, opening Will up for him. Will gasped at the welcome intrusion, hollowed and hallowed all at once. Every muscle clenched as Hannibal rubbed over his prostate, pulling out every moan he could. His cock bobbed against his stomach, aching to be touched. He was brought right to the edge, clawing and writhing, before Hannibal suddenly stopped.

Will shuddered as Hannibal removed his fingers, pushing back to keep him inside if only for a few moments longer. Hannibal watched him squirm and beg with his eyes, lip trembling with words unsaid. Hannibal coated his own cock and positioned himself between Will's legs. To fuck Will here on the altar, to consummate whatever *this* was, to repurpose the church for themselves, to make their own divinity between them, for *only* them… Hannibal didn't know how much he wanted that until now, *needed* it. In Hannibal's hesitation, Will nodded, inviting him inside, giving all of himself up, laid bare for the taking. Hannibal slowly slid inside, and Will's eyes rolled back into his head, the whites of his eyes almost simulating possession. Just one smooth thrust to the hilt and Will had all of him, accepted *all* of him. Both intertwined and blurred, one single entity in the house of God. Hannibal slowly fucked him, watching his chest rise and fall, his eyes flutter, his hands desperately search for purchase, fingers trembling. He picked up speed when Will wrapped his legs around his waist and his arms around his neck, pulling himself as close to him as he could. He left no room for doubt to slither between them; this was for them. Hannibal nuzzled into the bruise on Will's neck, gently kissing a halo around it.

Will moved a trembling hand down between them to pleasure himself. Hannibal smirked, and with one hand, he pinned Will's arms above his head like the saint watching them. The light sweat on his skin glistened gold and warm. He didn't fight against Hannibal holding him down, even if it prevented him from touching himself. He let Hannibal take control, the only thought he let himself have was the pleasure racking through him. Nothing else mattered. Hannibal continued to fuck Will deeply, watching as the rhythm of Will's breath became more erratic, filled with moans and gasps. As his pace quickened and his cock rapidly dragged over Will's prostate, he could see Will's cock twitch, leaking precum. With his free hand, Hannibal reached down and held Will's aching, begging cock. The touch alone caused him to jolt, bucking under his touch.

Hannibal worked him with a firm grip; warm, thick fingers wrapping around his even warmer cock. Will was too enraptured in the throes of ecstasy to make out a complete word, voice overcome with stammering moans. All he could do was utter stuttered sounds, and Hannibal drank in every single one. Hannibal could feel Will get close as his breath hitched higher, his hips making every attempt to fuck up into his palm and back down onto his cock, his once-smooth rhythm breaking from the uncontrollable twitch of his muscles. Hannibal did his best to time their orgasms together, slowing his hand while snapping his hips faster. The gentle tears that flowed down Will's cheeks sent Hannibal far over the edge as he remembered their taste, the sweet saltiness of his tears and sweat mixing on his tongue. With a throaty groan, he came deep inside Will. The twitch and heat of Hannibal's emptying cock made Will cum thick in Hannibal's hands and through his fingers, gentle spurts landing on his heaving chest. Hannibal watched as Will's jaw slacked, his eyes loll, and his breath quicken, fingers curling above him, legs pulling Hannibal deeper into him, as deep as he could possibly go, flexing hard to bring him past the limits of their anatomy. *He's beautiful.*

Hannibal struggled not to entirely collapse onto Will, waves of pleasure swimming up and down his veins, dancing along his nerves. With spent arms, he lifted himself up, admiring the man below him. Not just man anymore, but something else, something more. What he was could not be defined with the thick fog of sex lingering over them. He leaned over and kissed down Will's sweaty chest and stomach; tiny, tired moans spilling out as he lapped up little droplets of cum. Will reached down and touched the top of Hannibal's head, grazing fingertips over his scalp. Hannibal continued down then back up, gently kissing the bruise on Will's thigh, then abdomen, then chest, crawling up and kissing his neck, lingering there as long as breath would allow. Will sighed as Hannibal's lips grazed his jaw, softly planting on his lips. He held the sides of Hannibal's face, rubbing his ears and holding him close.

They didn't want to let each other go, didn't want to get up or get dressed. Time was still for now; it wouldn't be forever. They pressed their foreheads together, the oil from before anointing them both. They kissed, hands exploring skin, fingers entangled in mussed hair. A hint of sunrise started to bleed through the stained glass, decorating the floor and their bodies. Will smiled sadly, knowing he would have to leave. No one could find them this way, for both their sakes. He nodded and Hannibal nodded too, both still unwilling to move. They were both afraid of letting this peace go, of letting this moment slip between their fingers. As more light shined down, Hannibal begrudgingly knew it was time and he got up first, bringing back a warm, wet cloth, one for each of them to clean up. Will slowly got dressed but Hannibal needed a new robe, the one on the floor stained with sex and want. Will put on his jacket and kissed Hannibal one more time, deep and lingering, before departing.

A pit formed in Will's stomach as he drove home, a wave of heat and grit washed over him. He hadn't felt guilty in a while, and never with Hannibal. Their first encounter was one thing, but this? It felt beyond everything. It was the best Will had ever felt, especially with someone else. Trust, comfort, pleasure, care… all wrapped in a stained priest's robe splayed out on the altar floor. Hannibal knew what he was doing, knew what rules he had sworn to, but should Will have stopped him? He gripped his steering wheel tight not wanting to dissect it anymore. It was too painful, carving out holes in his short-lived peace. The thought was a buzzing gnat he couldn't swat away. Will was never afraid of going to hell; he didn't believe in it. But did he help send Hannibal there? Was feeling good, feeling *really* good, worth damning the only person who understood him?

Will got home and it was full morning. He got out of his car and hobbled inside, body pulsing despite the ache in his mind. He fed the dogs breakfast, snacking on some untoasted bread for the meantime, too tired to cook yet. He kicked off his shoes and didn't bother to change his clothes, and he flopped on the bed. *I can't see him… not yet. Not for a while. Not until I can wrap my head around all of this. Not until I can make this right again…* He wanted to see Hannibal, deep down, he wanted nothing more than night after night of bliss and wanting, but he wanted to tread carefully. For Hannibal's sake, if not his own, give Hannibal a chance to back away from it and save his soul if he wanted, if he *needed*. There was no way Will could even begin to replace the solace and purpose God had given Hannibal, and he didn't want to try. He wasn't sure he could give Hannibal all that God had given him, and there was a guilt he was taking Hannibal away from the carefully curated life he chose. Will shook it all from his mind, finding it easier to clear his head after Hannibal had commanded it of him. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, drifting off to sleep, the core of him still buzzing and warm.

Chapter End Notes

everyone thank FLEABAG for this chapter (and alex for showing me fleabag <333).
thank you for reading this thus far. any and all comments greatly appreciated <3

Holy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal hoped to see Will again, but night after night, he waited in the pews, in the confession booth, or laid out on the altar waiting for him in a lonely silence, lonelier than he had felt before. Lonelier now because he knew what he was missing. There was a connection Hannibal couldn't deny. *He must come back… at least… to say goodbye.* Hannibal didn't want to admit it out loud for fear of a wrath he couldn't quell, but how could Will abandon him when he was on the verge of abandoning God himself? Leaving everything he knew and worked for, for a man, who was a stranger not too long ago. *Not just a man.* It was not something he could bring himself to say out loud, even if just to himself in the quiet of his room. But Hannibal couldn't deny he saw God in Will, saw power and acceptance and peace. He filled all the cracks and gaps within him no one else dared to reach. He felt *complete*.

The following Sunday, Hannibal was giving his sermon. The pews were half full, which was normal; they only reached full capacity on holidays. He couldn't help but remember fucking Will as he paced the altar, selling God and righteousness to the audience. He could still smell his sweat, taste his flesh, hear his moans and cries as the memory of his twitching and writhing bloomed throughout his limbs. The doors opened, briefly letting in a swath of sunlight. It wasn't uncommon for people to show up late. He focused his gaze on the silhouette, trying to catch their face. As they stepped into the light, he could see who was smiling at him. *Will.* Will nodded and smiled once he got Hannibal's attention and sat in the very back near the aisle. He watched as Hannibal commanded the audience, witnessing something that made him feel powerful. Hannibal passed him the occasional glance but nothing that awarded any suspicion from the crowd, another thing kept secret and sacred between them. Towards the end, Hannibal brought everyone into a prayer, eyes closed and heads down. He didn't want Will out of his sight by closing his eyes, but he did. After a wordy prayer and *Amen*, he looked up and found Will was gone. Disappointment settled in him for a brief moment as Hannibal had hoped to talk to him, but he knew Will wanted to keep his presence there and his involvement a secret, a desire Hannibal respected. Hannibal took his appearance as a message that he'd return, if not this night, then soon.

Night fell, and a full, glowing moon beamed through, painting the walls of the church. Hannibal tried not to get his hopes up too much, but still, he waited as he had every night prior. Patiently, oh so very patiently. His heart raced when he heard the door open then slowly close, hoping beyond hope it was Will and not someone else. He looked over to find a familiar face blessing his church again. Will walked closer, meeting Hannibal halfway. He laid his coat down in the same spot he always did, and silence fell between them. Hannibal wanted to reach out and touch him but kept his hands steady; there was a trepidation in Will's eyes that matched his own, both their minds wandering too far from all the good they had gardened together.

Hannibal nodded, taking a deep but quiet breath. "I thought I'd see you sooner; wondered where you were." He tried to hide the sadness in his voice.

Will smiled weakly knowing full well he had hurt Hannibal. Not even a full bruise, just a sting. It hurt all the same. “I wanted to, believe me, I just…” he sighed. He chewed on his inner lip before speaking. “I guess a new guilt settled in, made a home. Old words of absolution couldn’t fix it, and soon the nightmares followed.” He paused. “I’m not only here because of the nightmares, Hannibal. I wanted to see you; guilt made me… hesitate.”

Hannibal cautiously cupped Will’s face in his hands, fearing the rejection of him pulling away. He didn’t, if anything, he leaned into it, nuzzling against his palm. Will felt good in his hands. Hannibal nodded in understanding. “I see.” He pulled away and gestured to Will to follow him.

They walked along the walls of the church, depictions of saints and holy men towering over them. Grief, fear, resilience; almost every human feeling captured in paintings that felt as old as time. Hannibal spoke calmly, gesturing to the art. “Martyrs for their cause. Devout faith in this life, their untimely deaths cleansed them, absolved them, revered them. No guilt to speak of.”

A man strung up to a tree, arrows penetrating the flesh every which way watched them. He saw too much of himself in the thick layers of oil. Will sighed and asked, “Is death the only solace? The only true way to be clean?”

“No,” Hannibal held his hand over the flame of the candles, closer than most would. “Pain can act as a vessel, enough without taking life.” Will’s face furrowed as he watched the heat kiss Hannibal’s flesh, cracking a confused smile. Hannibal continued to explain. “Self-flagellation, as old as religion itself. Taking responsibility for your own misdoings, enduring suffering, penance. Mortify the flesh, kill the sin within. Take control of one’s destiny and fate. One doesn’t need to truly die to be cleansed and freed of all guilt.”

Will looked back up at the paintings, his own fingertips flirting with the flames. “Is that something you do?” The words crawled over his tongue slowly. He looked over his shoulder with a wry smile.

Hannibal laughed softly. “Yes.”

Will imagined Hannibal in pain, both by his hand and by Hannibal’s, whimpering and begging. He wondered how far he’d go; to bruising? To bleeding? How often did Hannibal find himself sinning enough to enact pain and retribution to please God? Or was it to please himself?

Hannibal sensed a disturbance, hoping it wasn’t disgust or pity, that this honesty was as welcome and accepted as truths prior. “Perhaps what you need, Will, is not from your hand but a deliverance through someone else.”

“Oh yeah?” Will smirked. “How might I go about doing that?”

Hannibal held Will’s hands in his own, palms facing up. He kissed his fingers down to his wrists, gently closing his fist around Will’s. “I could be those hands for you, Will. Controlled, unbiased yet forgiving.” He brought Will’s hands to his lips again, kissing his knuckles, as if

to hint *these hands cannot wrought your own justice, let me take on the task of your penance and keep your hands clean.*

Will licked his lips and thought about it briefly. Pain was something he was familiar with, just never in the setting Hannibal was proposing. Still, it intrigued him. Hands that had only brought pleasure were now offering pain; or penance wearing pain's skin. He was curious what Hannibal would, *could,* do, and he smiled and nodded with consent, eyes searching Hannibal's for further explanation. He started to lower himself onto his knees as he had before, but Hannibal clicked his tongue at him. Hannibal walked over and sat in the front row pews. He called to him, tapping on his knee, telling Will to bend over his lap.

Will smirked, playfully shaking his head. "Hannibal…"

"Will." Hannibal's voice was calm but demanding, serious and expectant. The same tone used when he commanded him to *kneel.*

Will took a deep breath, feeling his palms start to sweat as his heart raced. He nodded and walked over to Hannibal who undid his pants for him with patient fingers, gently pulling them down past his knees. He opened his lap again and Will bent over, chest and stomach cradled by his muscular thighs. Hannibal hiked Will's shirt up and dragged his fingertips up his spine then back down, over his ass and thighs. Will shivered at the touch. The warmth of his palm grazed over his skin and the anticipation of what would follow made his jaw clench. To submit to something that Hannibal did to himself felt *intimate*, almost intrusive, and Will found himself longing for whatever touch Hannibal would give. The same hand used to strike both of them, now one flesh in the palm of his hand. *Would it be the same pain that Hannibal felt?*

Hannibal rubbed warm circles over his skin, pressing into tense muscles with his fingers, making him lax and pliable. "Your only focus is to confess. Leave everything else to me, do you understand?"

Will nodded frantically, letting out the heavy sigh he kept in his lungs too long, his chest now burning. "Yes, Hannibal."

"Good." A light smack to Will's ass, nothing painful, just a test. He felt Will recoil against him, the surprise stinging more than the contact itself. "Now, confess." He knew he didn't need to confine Will there, Will wanted to be there, chose his place. He wouldn't run away from this, for this is an absolution he nearly begged for. Instead of holding him down, Hannibal used his free hand to caress Will's head to counter the pummeling sting to come.

As soon as Will started to speak, Hannibal's hand collided with his ass. At first it took him off guard, stuttering his speech, "I felt guilty… after we f-fucked…," but Hannibal's pace and strength didn't change. He effortlessly switched between his ass cheeks, never once missing a beat, hitting the same marks without fail. One, then another, then another until he would eventually deem Will absolved.

"Why?" Hannibal could feel Will twitch and clench beneath him, his breath quickened. His ass started to get pink, sensitivity rising.

Will knew the pace but still felt surprised every time they made contact. “You’re a priest and I…” Stings were slowly becoming throbs, Hannibal’s hand relentless. “Priests aren’t supposed… to fuck…. A man esp-” *Fuck.* He swore Hannibal increased the strength of his swing, but he knew his nerves were just rapidly firing, adjusting to the onslaught of stimulation.

“Am I not capable of making my own decision, Will?” The contrast of his fingers gently petting his hair and another hand smacking his ever-reddening ass confused Will’s body, comfort and torment mixing bittersweetly.

“Y-yes but I -” Will let out his first real whimper, fighting the tears that threatened to fall.

“No buts, Will. If I am capable, then it is not your decision, therefore not your guilt.” Will’s ass was bright red, skin hot to the touch, even warm just hovering above it. Goosebumps bloomed wildly over his flesh, nerves begging and pleading for a mercy that would not come. Not yet anyway, not until Will’s guilt was gone, shirked away in a blanket of penance. He smirked as he felt Will quickly growing hard, grinding against his leg, every *smack* of his hand inadvertently pushing his hips into the meat of his thigh, stimulating him. *How sweet all the sensations must feel*, Hannibal thought to himself, *tickling, biting, caressing every nerve at once. Brain and body overexcited, mercilessly held over the ledge*. “So, Will, what do you have to feel guilty over?”

Will was bucking under Hannibal’s touch, his tears started to flow freely. He gripped fistfuls of Hannibal’s robe, fighting not to bite into his knuckles. Pain was mixing with pleasure; he could feel his pulse throb between his legs, almost embarrassed and ashamed. He knew Hannibal would have noticed, there was no hiding it. Was he supposed to get hard from this? He swore under his breath, earning him an extra strong *smack.* He yelped loudly, biting into Hannibal’s robe.

“That isn’t an answer Will.” Hannibal kept pace, one hand stroking his hair, cupping his chin, the other providing penance. He could feel Will start to gently sob, chest heaving. “What do you have to be guilty of?”

“N-nothing…” Will spoke quietly, trying to mask his tears, more contrite over that than being aroused by it all. His toes curled, the heat of his ass spread down his thighs. Every smack pushed his cock into Hannibal, nearly stroking him, the fabric was unbearably soft against him. *He’s… he’s doing it on purpose… he… he <u>wants</u> me worked up and flustered… God wants us to feel pleasure*

Hannibal gently tugged up on his hair and turned Will to face him, his other hand still setting fire to his flesh. “Louder, Will, I couldn’t hear you. What do you have to be guilty over?”

Will clenched his jaw, letting out a half-scream. “Nothing!”

Hannibal smiled, immediately loosening the grip on his curls, clenched fist unfurling, delicate fingertips returning to their tender care. “So, you have no reason to feel guilty then?”

Will shook his head, trying to bury his face in his hands. “No… I-I don’t…” A weight lifted off his chest but it still wasn’t over.

“I absolve you Will, God absolves you.” Hannibal paused, the hand on his ass still working ruthlessly. “But do you absolve *yourself*?” There was a long silence, only sobs and rhythmic *smacks* of flesh against flesh echoed through the church. “Will, I asked you a question. Speak up.” Every word was met with a sting. “Do. You. Absolve. *Yourself*?”

Will fully succumbed to the screams of his nerves and sobbed. In between heaves, he managed to eke out a quiet and stuttered *yes*. His body jolted as he unexpectedly came at his own absolution, a powerful orgasm vibrated through him, sweetly mixing the burn and blessing of his body. Hannibal cooed at Will as he weakly fucked against Hannibal’s thigh, cock spent but hungry for more sensation, suddenly left without. The pitiful pumps of his hips amused Hannibal; he gave it all he had. The hand on his ass stopped delivering penance as it was no longer needed. Instead, he gently dragged his fingertips across the expended flesh as Will writhed beneath him. He gently hushed as he petted Will’s hair, soothing away the cries and whimpers he brought forth. When Will settled and softened, sobs now mere whimpers and sighs, Hannibal reached down and wiped Will’s cum onto his fingers. He brought it to his mouth and stifled a moan at the taste. He tasted even sweeter than he smelled.

He tilted Will’s face towards him, blushed and warm, and softly commanded, “Open,” as he ran a thumb over his cheek, wiping away streaks of tears.

Will complied, brain buzzing and skin vibrating. Hannibal’s fingers entered his mouth and Will closed his lips, sucking on his knuckles. *God,* he had never tasted himself before. With a shaky hand, he held onto Hannibal’s wrist, holding him in his mouth, suckling and swallowing. Hannibal petted his scalp, *beautiful boy*, and spoke softly. “See how good salvation tastes?” *Pleasure can be felt and tasted and enjoyed. God gave us mouths for a reason… tongues to taste.* Musk lingered on Hannibal’s tongue, and he hummed quiet prayer as Will nourished himself.

Hannibal was right; pain brought Will to the halls of absolution, welcoming him into the foyer, and it felt good, *tasted* good. Sweet and sating. Even with his ass throbbing with heat, cock rubbed raw on Hannibal’s robe, he had never felt more at peace. Every nerve had sung their song, and a reverberating choir filled the hollow of his bones. Hannibal continued to stroke his hair, Will dutifully suckling on his knuckles. Fingers trailed down his back, gently over his tender ass making Will jolt and whisper a whine into Hannibal’s palm. He was so pretty lying there, but Hannibal wanted to give him a proper treat for being so good. Every retribution deserved a reward. “Are you able to stand, dear Will?” Will nodded weakly, the hum of a *yes* vibrated through Hannibal’s knuckles. “Then can I offer you a bath?”

Will lazily nodded, and Hannibal pulled his fingers from Will’s mouth. He brought Will to his feet, steadying him on weak limbs. Hannibal gathered their clothes, and Will groaned and hobbled. Hannibal delicately guided Will by his waist to the back of the church where he resided. The bathroom was grander than Will expected, the clawfoot tub large and golden. Hannibal ran him a bath, keeping an eye on Will in his periphery. When the water was comfortably hot, he assisted Will into the tub, helping him sit and relax. The water felt good until his ass touched the surface and it stung, making Will hiss. Hannibal stifled a chuckle. As Will settled in, a blanket of comfort enveloped him, the heat lapping at sensitive skin and

spent nerves. He sighed and dipped into the tub, head just above the water. Every muscle in his body melted and relaxed.

With all the care in the world, Hannibal tenderly bathed Will. Will sighed and moaned under his touch, settling deep below the water's surface. Hannibal washed his hair, fingertips rubbing every inch of his scalp, then added conditioner to every curl. He was slow, pulling out every soft sigh he could. He kissed Will's neck then lifted Will's arms out one at a time, gently scrubbing up and down them, admiring the curve of every muscle, every mark and scar. Hannibal hadn't noticed how toned he was, strong from use. A sculpted God of flesh instead of marble. Will was perfect. Hannibal kissed each of Will's fingers and knuckles, then up his arm to his shoulder. Every inch of him was sacred. Hannibal washed down his chest and across his stomach, smiling at the fading bruises he left from before, remembering his taste. He moved down his legs, worshipping every part of him. The crease of his hips, thick thighs, muscular calves. Hannibal massaged his feet for a long while, one foot then the other, watching Will struggle to keep his head above water, completely relaxed. A push into the soles of his feet earned him mumbled moans. He had Will sit up, and he groaned a small protest, and he scrubbed his back, fingers outlining muscle bellies, kissing anywhere his fingers just abandoned. He cleaned his face, gently washing away tear stains, kissing each cheek. Hannibal rubbed his temples and down his jaw, thumbs caressing over cheekbones, soft lips pressed to his forehead. He then moved to Will's cock, spent and soft. He washed it with care as still more soft moans slipped out.

When Hannibal was done, he continued to touch Will, committing every curve and line to memory. Every strain was softened, every muscle malleable under his touch. Hannibal lauded every part of him until Will's entire body was pliant, melting in the palm of his hands. He continued to touch him until the water cooled down but before Will had any chance to shiver or be uncomfortable. Time went by faster than Hannibal could have hoped; he hoped there would be more time. The tub was drained, and Hannibal helped Will step out so as to not slip on the cool tile floor. Hannibal dried Will off; his neck, armpits, back, ass. Every part of Will he was eager to touch, again and again as many times as Will would let him. When Will was dry, Hannibal offered him fresh clothes, the softest fabrics he could find. Will could tell they were new, not donated like the last pair of pants Hannibal had lent him. Will smiled, remembering he still had to bring them back. Hannibal held Will's face in his hands, kissing him long and deep. Will grabbed Hannibal's waist, pulling him closer. They lightly moaned into each other's mouth, tongue passing past teeth, sharing secrets and prayers.

Will was tired, Hannibal could see that, eyes and head heavy. He gave Will one last kiss, immediately regretting sending him home, but he needed sleep and proper rest. Their session took a lot out of him, and Hannibal prayed he was better for it. Hannibal hoped after today, Will would never have another nightmare. He also hoped Will would come back to see him even if his nightmares were truly gone, that what Will said was true. That he wanted to see Hannibal regardless of his dreams. Only time would tell if he was telling the truth.

After Will left, hesitant heavy doors closing behind him, Hannibal brought his robe to the sink to clean Will's cum from the fabric. At first, he scrubbed it happily, remembering the feel of Will's hot flesh under his hand, fingers in his curls, the pathetic, feeble thrust of Will into his thigh. He didn't need to chase his own pleasure, he still felt warm and delighted with Will bent over his knee and writhing. It all quickly started to crumble at the memory of saints

and Christ looking down on them, all eyes on his depravity, witnesses to the sacred vows he broke with passion and vigor. What would God say to him now?

The simple bath was more than a cleansing, it was a *worship.* Idolizing anything, especially any*one*, besides God himself was a break in the sacrament he promised to uphold. But Hannibal found himself… not caring. Will came to him with nightmares, guilt for seducing and fucking a priest, and Hannibal without any doubt absolved him. Will even absolved himself and Hannibal was proud. Hannibal was just as much a part of it all as Will, the match that started the wildfire. But Hannibal didn't care. He looked up at the old painting of God above the sink, eyes heavy and piercing. That was just a painting now. Oil on canvas, faded from sunlight and age. *Nothing I can touch or taste or hear. Just a painting… nothing more.*

Hannibal could feel the pull of where his faith was turning, and he didn't dare stop it. Would it all be in vain? Abandoning God didn't feel half as frightening as the potential rejection from his new one. A new deity walked into his life, tired-eyed and curly-haired, and Hannibal wanted to embrace him, *all* of him. Dedicate his body and prayer to him. But would Will accept him as a disciple, *could* he? He had accepted Hannibal's sins, but what of his worship and devotion? Was that too big of an ask, too much for one man to handle? A mere mortal? His faith was a runaway train, and he prayed Will wasn't tied to the tracks, terrified and afraid, but the conductor, in control and empowered.

Will had kept Hannibal's secret, abandoning his job, justice, his own brand of faith. And Hannibal was teetering the edge, ready to plunge into new waters for someone who made him feel better, warmer, *safer* than God ever had… ever could. Hannibal didn't want to dwell on what-ifs now. He knew in time he would have to talk to Will, but for now, he'd clean up their mess and follow wherever Will took him.

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It didn't take long for Will to come back; he couldn't feign only visiting because of nightmares. He wanted to see Hannibal more often than that and for more reasons. He wanted to go on his own volition, not because poor sleep held a knife to his throat. He could admit to himself he wanted to see Hannibal, plain and simply. Hannibal accepted him and gave him an indescribable peace. His ass was still thoroughly bruised, much to his satisfaction. Salvation felt good, better than he expected, and even better by Hannibal's hand. It wasn't red and hot anymore but mottled purple and red and blue. Every time he sat, he hissed, but without fail, it brought a smile to his face and warmth to his core. His ass ached during the long drive to the church, bringing a flood of memory up his spine. He pulled into the parking lot late into the night, as he always had. Every time prior, he had always been the only car in the lot. No other life besides scrounging raccoons at most. He didn't feel he wanted to waste his time tonight, he was anxious to see Hannibal. He gave the lot a quick scan and was satisfied.

He walked in, shutting the door a bit harder than normal, the excitement of the nerves chipping away at his fine motor control. The night was warm, warmer than it had ever been, so he didn't have a jacket with him. He walked slowly, making sure to click the heels of his shoes against the ground to garner Hannibal's attention with the echo. Hannibal peered over his shoulder and smiled. Will licked his lips and inched towards the confession booth. The bite of his lip and his hungry stare wordlessly told Hannibal to grab what was needed. It felt a

bit cliché, but nothing about them was conventional. This would be different, be *theirs.* Will entered the priest side of the booth, touching the smooth, wooden walls beneath his fingertips, patiently waiting for Hannibal's return.

He could hear the echo of Hannibal's footsteps grow louder. As Hannibal started to enter the confessioner's side Will clicked his tongue. "Try again, Father Lecter. You're a priest after all, isn't *this* your side?"

Hannibal smirked and came over to where Will was and walked just past the threshold. Hannibal closed the door and audibly latched the poor excuse for a lock, metal clinking against metal. A breath hitched in Will's chest, anticipation fluttering his nerves. "Is that to keep people out?"

Hannibal cocked his head, trailing fingertips along Will's jaw. "Normally." He licked his lips and breathed in deep, drinking in the sight of Will, eyes wild and dilated.

"Normally?" Will was interrupted as Hannibal probed his mouth with his thumb, barely pulling open his jaw.

"It has a new purpose today." Hannibal smiled, wiping Will's drool onto his own cheek, fingertips grazing the prickling hairs of his beard. He reached past Will to set the oil on the seat. He stepped closer and Will could feel Hannibal's body heat through the thin fabric of his shirt, his heart racing, begging to feel more of him.

Will moaned softly, the pressure under his belt growing unbearable. He tried to shift his weight to relieve the strain, but it didn't help, thoroughly caged behind fabric and the leather of his belt. "And what purpose might that be?"

Hannibal leaned in, bringing his lips hard against Will's earning him another deep moan. He pulled away, hand firmly placed at the nape of Will's neck, and whispered, "To keep you here, where I want you, where you *belong.*" Will swore under his breath and Hannibal tugged up on his hair, fistful of dark curls. He held him there for a short while, admiring the furrow in his brow and trembling in his lip. Hannibal let go and they both quickly fumbled, getting themselves and the other undressed. The booth was much roomier than Will could hope for, but it was still a tight space.

Both naked, they pulled each other in, pressing their bodies against each other as their tongues explored the other's mouth. Will pulled Hannibal in by his ass and kissed down his neck and Hannibal groaned. He could feel Will's lips smile against his flesh, quickly followed by sharp teeth biting down and digging in. He hissed and moaned as Will feasted greedily, sucking and gnawing on as much flesh that could fit into his mouth. He savored the pulse against his tongue, the tension of tendon between his teeth. Will's fingers gently stroked Hannibal's back, giving him a taste of the pain and pleasure he was gifted mere nights ago.

Hannibal pushed Will against a wall, deepening the bruise on his neck as Will fought not to let go, and he smiled at Will wickedly, the throb in his throat blooming outward. He kissed along Will's collarbone and softly commanded him to stay put. Will always did as he was told. Hannibal oiled up his hands and watched Will's breath quicken, a light tremble in his stance. He wrapped his fingers around Will's cock with one hand, stroking him agonizingly

slow, root to tip. Will curled his toes, fighting the desire to fuck into Hannibal's hand, staying still as he was asked. Hannibal's other hand slipped underneath, probing past clenched cheeks and circling Will's entrance. Will threw his head back, putting his hands on Hannibal to keep himself upright.

As a finger slipped in, Will's eyes started to roll. Hannibal *tsk*ed him and whispered, "Eyes on me, Will. Embrace your pleasure, don't shy away. All of this is yours."

Will nodded arrhythmically as another finger slipped in, gently fucking him. He swore through clenched teeth, struggling to keep his gaze from slipping. Hannibal kept the pace of both his hands slow, working in the same rhythm. The fingers inside Will pumped, rolling fingertips over his prostate, the hand on his cock working him in a greedy fist. As Will leaked precum, Hannibal couldn't resist praising him. "Beautiful boy, Will. Let it wash over you."

Gentle words made Will's cock twitch hard in Hannibal's hand, and he knew Hannibal noticed, for the praises kept flowing effortlessly, gentle whispers licking his ears. "Such a good boy, so good, that's it."

Will whimpered, working hard not to give in to the nagging buckle of his knees. He gripped hard into Hannibal's shoulders, nails biting into flesh. Hannibal didn't even flinch, entirely focused on the unraveling before him. Will tried to reach down and reciprocate but Hannibal gently reprimanded him. "My time will come, but right now, it's yours," and he slipped in a third finger. Will bucked against his hands, two hands working him in sync. Every twitch of his body amplified his senses, fingers inside and surrounding him, kissing every nerve they could reach. His mind whirled and his body shook, held up by Hannibal's hand inside him. When Hannibal felt satisfied that Will was prepped and pliant, he pulled his fingers out. He stroked Will for a bit longer, edging him to shudders, bringing him as far to the edge as he could without spilling him over.

Hannibal guided Will to his knees by his cock, then turned him around and bent him over the seat. Hannibal got behind him, scratching down Will's back; fingernails over his bruised, tender ass made him hiss and jolt. Goosebumps bloomed over old marks as his muscles clenched. Hannibal kissed down his spine, one for every vertebra, holding his hips up and steady. He admired the marks on Will's ass, the first proper look at his work. He kissed the bruises, brushing his teeth over them. On the darkest, deepest bruise, he sunk his canines in and Will howled loudly. Hannibal gingerly grinded his teeth into the screaming, sensitive ache as Will's toes and fists curled in agony. Hannibal might have stopped sooner if he didn't hear Will moaning despite the pain, guttural and near-growling. Hannibal pulled away then tapped the inside of Will's thighs telling him to spread, and he did as his chest trembled, digits relaxing as the sharp pain in his ass devolved into a tolerable throb.

Hannibal carefully spread Will and dragged his tongue over his asshole. Will let out a high pitched mewl, gently pushing back onto the wet heat of him. Hannibal began to devour Will; to dine on God was a blessing communion could never replicate. Even the act of eating man could not compare. The scent of Will mixed with the lightly herbed oil made him taste truly divine. He licked and probed and consumed until his own cock throbbed, begging and leaking for more – he couldn't wait any longer. He pulled away, giving Will just a few moments to catch his breath. He slicked and lined up his cock and pulled Will by his hips

onto him. Will moaned as Hannibal filled him inch by inch, breached to the hilt. Hannibal folded Will's arms behind his back and pinned his wrists to his spine while his other hand grabbed a fistful of damp curls. With Will secure, he pulled out then snapped his hips forward using Will as leverage. Whimpers blurred with moans and Hannibal picked up speed, fucking him deep. The sound of flesh slapping against flesh filled the air.

Hannibal thrust in as deep as Will's bruised ass would let him, digging the crests of his pelvis into the soft, tender flesh, and he let go of Will's arms and hair. He petted his tender scalp then pulled him upright, Will's back leaning against Hannibal's chest. Hannibal wrapped one arm around his soft belly and another around his heaving chest, fingers digging into the hollow of his collarbone, holding him tight. Will lolled his head back onto Hannibal's shoulder, quivering lips and hot breath against his ear, and Hannibal sunk his teeth into the tender flesh of his shoulder. He fucked up into him, pulling Will back onto his cock with every thrust.

The hand on Will's chest migrated up to his throat, fingers gently squeezing against his pulse; the hand on his belly slithered up towards his nipple, pinching it between his fingers. Will gasped and shuddered, hands gripping Hannibal's thighs for support, nails scratching upward, leaving angry red lines on his skin. Hannibal squeezed and rolled Will's nipple between his thumb and finger until it was tender and erect. He then flicked his nipple earning him a pained groan and a writhing roll of Will's hips, further penetrating himself on his cock. Hannibal kissed Will's cheek, holding his lips there and Will tight to his body as he slowed his pace.

He kept one hand on Will's throat, and the other explored south, cradling Will's aching cock in his palm. Will lost control over his breath, stuttering and shaking. Hannibal decided to ease his struggle by tightening his hand over Will's throat, cutting off his air. He stroked Will's cock faster and fucked him harder, watching Will's eyes roll and face redden. Hannibal nuzzled into his neck and cooed sweetly at him, "Good boy, I've got you, cum for me, just for me."

Will's jaw slacked open, his body fell slightly limp, no sound or breath escaped. His body flexed and trembled as he climaxed hard, and Hannibal released his hold. Will gasped and choked, soft whimpers escaped through his tender throat as he came in Hannibal's hand. Hannibal smiled and kissed his temple. "Yes, that's it, so perfect for me." Will whined and squirmed as Hannibal continued to pump his sensitive, softening cock, emptying him of every drop. When Hannibal was satisfied, he pulled his hand away, changing his pace to short, quick, little thrusts. He brought his cum painted fingers to his lips, sucking his fingers clean, wiping any remnants as a streak down Will's panting chest.

He could hear the high squeaks and strain in Will's throat, and he could feel the harsh quaking on top of him. Hannibal wanted to *see* him, drink down the very sight of him; nourished and sated. He wanted to savor the divine gift he'd been given, cherish the God unfolding in front of him. His pace slowed to a stop, still deeply seated. Hannibal slowly pulled out, earning him a desperate, pleading whine from Will at the emptiness. He helped Will to his feet and turned him around. He brushed the sweaty curls from his forehead and kissed him there, the lingering smell of musk on his hands mixed sweetly with Will's sweat.

He guided Will to sit, then slowly lifted his legs up so his back was lying on the seat, or as close to lying down as Hannibal could get him in the tight space.

Hannibal smiled as he hovered over Will and he slowly slid inside again, as slow as he possibly could, dragging his cock against Will's spent prostate. Will's eyes fluttered, and his head lolled back, muffled wails barely escaped his mouth. Hannibal kept his leisure pace easy, letting Will enjoy every inch as it entered him, filling him up. Hannibal fucked him slow and rooted, burying himself as deep as their bodies would allow. The act in itself was a confession. Hannibal no longer teetered between faiths; now fully falling and waiting to hit the water, waiting for God to accept him, too. The near drowning of it all as a baptism, to be submerged and engulfed and wholly, willingly swallowed in this new divine doctrine. God beneath him, trusting and writhing, completely blissed at his touch. Melted into and fed out of his open palm. Nothing could make him feel as powerful as having God unravel in his hands, trusting him to hold him together or stitch him anew. Hannibal wanted nothing more than to care for his God, to give him everything; his life, his soul, *everything*. He ran a hand along the backs of Will's thighs and gently folded them down. The sweat of all his efforts fell on Will's forehead and christened him. Will, now blessed and begging, pleaded with his eyes, wanting more, wanting *this* to last forever.

They'd been so lost in each other, erratic heartbeats and sultry groans filling their ears, the contact of their skin garnering all their attention, they nearly didn't hear the church doors open and close. As the heavy doors slammed shut, they froze, Will wide-eyed and silently panting. The sharp echo of footsteps confirmed their fears. *Someone else was in there.* Hannibal smirked at Will's terror and began to fuck him slow, dragging tip to thick hilt. Will writhed, but he knew he couldn't be too loud. He shouldn't be in the confession booth, and he shouldn't be getting fucked by Hannibal, *the priest,* in it either.

Another door and a heavy sigh told them both someone was just on the other side, only a foot or so away from them, separated by a measly wooden wall. Hannibal was thankful the mesh kept their privacy. As long as they were quiet, he knew with confidence they couldn't be seen, wouldn't be detected; their secret safe in the sweat of their skin. As the stranger spoke, "Forgive me Father, for I have sinned," Hannibal grabbed Will's cock and started stroking him. It went from soft to hard and twitchy quickly, eager for more, Will's cock ready before he was. Inside Will's head he was *screaming,* overstimulated and terrified, his heart thrashed in his ears, but they were both perfectly silent to anyone's ear.

"How long has it been since your last confession?" Hannibal's voice was calm and rehearsed, not a hint of strain or breathlessness in his voice. Without a beat, he fucked and stroked Will, giving him no reprieve or pause to calm or catch his breath. It still felt good, *too good,* to hear a stranger confess their petty little life while their bodies melded and sinned. Untouchable.

Will fought hard not to wriggle too much, worried the wood supporting their weight would creak. He was curling his toes, flexing his fists, and clenching his jaw to redirect the tension to anywhere but his voice. He didn't know what *ungodly* sound Hannibal would pull out of him. Hannibal's rosary, which hung on a small nail in the wall of the booth, fell from its perch and landed on the soft flesh of Will's gasping chest. Hannibal grabbed it in his hand, wondering what divine intervention placed it back in his path. A test, a warning? Hannibal didn't care. *Maybe God summoning the object of his prayers.* He saw Will struggle, and to

help keep him quiet, he wrapped his hand around his throat again and squeezed, rosary in hand. Breathe in, breathe out, but no noise; nothing to give away their little paradise. The dark wooden beads kissed Will's skin as the cross gently draped over his neck. *God, everything about him is transcendent.*

Will, fucked thoroughly inside and out, expended and breathless, could feel another orgasm nearing breach. The burn threatened to consume him, licking up his spine and gnawing down his legs. He roughly grabbed onto Hannibal's wrist, pulling him in, begging him to squeeze him tighter just to silence himself further, and to give him purchase. The pressure on his throat and a slight pain in his palm mixed deliciously with the deep thrust of Hannibal's cock inside and the grip of his fist on his overstimulated, weeping cock. The very core of him shook, trembling, threatening to crack him in half, expose everything, and electricity shot through all his limbs as he came thick and white onto his stomach.

It took every muscle in Hannibal's body to tame and quell the near-violent bucking beneath him. Will's softening cock twitched against the sticky mess on his belly. Hannibal, greedy and famished, needing to see the complete unraveling of Will below him, looked down at his hand around Will's throat and saw something luscious and delectable that made his own cock twitch. In an effort to silence himself, Will grabbed onto Hannibal, catching the sharpened cross of the rosary in his palm, puncturing the flesh and injuring himself. A dark, thick line of blood squeezed through Will's fingers, down Hannibal's hand, onto his own throat, pooling in the hollows of his clavicles.

Hannibal could feel himself about to lose control; seeing Will's blood, his *sacrifice*, threatened to send him over the edge, diving headfirst into the waters of his baptism with no desire for air. He interrupted the person confessing, gave them hail marys, and kindly asked them to lock the church door behind them given the hour of night. They were none the wiser, delighted at their absolution, and they thanked Father Lecter for his forgiveness. They closed and locked the door as was requested and a silence fell in the church again. As soon as Hannibal heard the steps disappear, the door close, and the lock click, all his attention was back on Will.

Blood smeared handsomely on Will's throat and Hannibal removed his grip. He brought his wrist to his lips, inhaling deeply as sweet copper filled his nose, and he licked up the warm drip of blood to taste Will, truly *devouring* him. The blood, the *life,* of God blessed his teeth, coated his tongue, sated his belly. *God gave us mouths for a reason; he gave us teeth to chew and swallow and sate ourselves, and tongues to taste*. The thought of his rosary, sharpened for his own penance, his own pain, bleeding him and now bleeding Will, too, made his heart race, bruising itself against his sternum. Their blood meeting, mixing on the cross, a shared agony. The smell of copper and cum filled the air and Hannibal started to rail Will hard, fast, and unrelenting.

With a bloodied hand, he gently slapped Will's cheek, smudging blood on his face, getting his attention. "Come back to me, Will. It's just us now, only us. *Let me hear you."*

Hannibal put his bloody fingers in Will's mouth, pulling open his jaw and summoning his cries and whimpers. Will had tasted his blood before, but never like this. Never this sweet and warm. He moaned against Hannibal's fingers, pacified by rust painting his knuckles.

With his unoccupied hand, Hannibal brought Will's bleeding palm up to his face. Ravenous and hungry, he brought it to his lips, kissing the puncture and making Will whimper. Hannibal wondered if it was the act or the pain that made him wail, *perhaps both*. Kissing turned to slow yet greedy licking, and he swiped the flat of his tongue over the wound, the tip of it gently probing the puncture. The pain made Will swear under his breath. Hannibal pulled his fingers away. With blood in his mouth, he bent down and kissed Will deeply, swapping tongues and teeth. Blood mixed with saliva, a lipstick of sacrifice streaked and stained across their mouths. Long since pushed over the edge, Hannibal came with a rough shudder inside Will, harder now than ever before. He whimpered into Will's mouth as he emptied, fully seated, tightly holding onto him for any ounce of purchase.

They both gently sighed, arms and legs relaxing in unison. Their kisses grew lazy and soft, heads gently pressed together. Having to separate from Will felt like his biggest sin. To pull away and out of his God rattled his core, to tear apart their union, to carve out what was so carefully stitched together. He stayed as long as he could, brushing the back of his hand on Will's glowing, rosy cheeks. Fingertips dragged over goosebumped skin making tiny sighs fill the air. As slowly as he could manage, body entirely spent, he disconnected from Will. Will fussed at the loss, soothed and quelled by Hannibal whispering sweet nothings into his ear. He carried Will in his arms out of the booth, gently laying him in the bath again. He turned the faucet on low, careful not to let cool water splash against Will's blushed, sensitive skin.

Hannibal bathed him much like last time but kept Will's injured hand above the water. He thoroughly and gently cleaned every inch of him, honoring every part of him. Every spot a new prayer, a new place to sow devotion. He wiped the blood off Will's cheek, smiling at the complete and utter peace in his face. He looked at Will's wounded hand for a while. A self-inflicted stigmata, close enough for Hannibal, at least. He gingerly wiped away the blood, rubbing a finger along the torn edges. The wound was small but significant. *Christlike*. He injured himself as Hannibal had, bled for his and Hannibal's sins, cleansing them both. Hannibal didn't need to deify Will, he did it himself. All the power to ascend above man was already in his possession, the final seal cracked open with the spilling of life. There was no doubt in Hannibal's mind that Will was his true God, holy beyond disbelief.

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Will visiting felt so routine at this point, as if he belonged at the church with Hannibal. But only at night. Only when the pews were quiet and the sun was silenced, and the only light and sound were the candles flickering along the walls. He learned his lesson, though, and after their last encounter, he carefully checked the parking lot to make sure he was truly alone. On this night, he even locked the church entry doors behind him, making sure no other interruption could plague them. Their time together was sacred and should only be witnessed by flickering fire and starlight.

Will found the heart of the church eerily quiet, he had never seen it so lifeless. He slowly walked the floors, checking all the places he had grown familiar with. The booth was empty, as was the altar, and he found himself alone among the pews. The candles were lit, so Will knew Hannibal was still around and awake. He slowly walked along the edge, eyeing the painting above him, waiting for Hannibal to return. He stopped under St. Sebastian, his hand

instinctually moving to his neck as his eyes danced down the arrows. *When devout faith brings your own end…. I wonder where Hannibal's faith will land him.* Will heard a small noise coming from the back of the church and went to investigate.

Will ventured through halls and past rooms he only held vague, faint memories for. The only times he had been this deep into the core of the church, his mind was foggy, eyes nearly glazed over. He relied more on the soft sounds growing louder to guide him. It didn't take him long to find the source of the noise, curiosity finally sated.

Hannibal was standing still, shoulders hunched, priest collar in his hand, simply staring at it, unmoving except for the slight tremble in his hands. Will made his presence known without words, but Hannibal already knew he was there by scent and sound. Will was unmistakable. Hannibal's voice was weak, weaker than Will had ever heard it; even weaker than when he first confessed. His lip quivered as he spoke, lashline almost glistening. "I… I can't put it on."

Will sighed heavily, staying in Hannibal's periphery but getting close, careful not to overwhelm him. "Why is that?"

Hannibal shook his head, shoulders sagging further as he sighed. "This collar symbolizes my devotion to God, his possession of me, *owning* me."

"Has something changed between you and God?" Will stood in front of Hannibal and feared their last encounter had sent him over the edge, past absolution, somewhere he wasn't sure he could rescue him. He was right; Hannibal had tipped over the edge. But it was by his own volition and into warmer, more welcoming waters. Hannibal would drown there if he had to, and he'd do it gladly.

Hannibal looked up, eyes nearing tears. "I have… found new faith. I cannot wear this in earnest, for it honors my old God."

Will smiled softly, fully in front of Hannibal, staring down at him, his hands deep in his pockets. They wrestled to get out, free themselves, caress and cherish the man before him. "So, your faith now lies elsewhere? Found a new lap to sit on, a new hearth to keep you warm?"

"Y-yes." Hannibal nodded weakly, hands shaking even more. The admittance nearly didn't make it past his teeth, carried only by a broken whisper gasping for freedom.

Will stepped closer, brushing the mess of hair from Hannibal's face, cupping his jaw in his palm. He tilted Hannibal's face towards him, staring deep into the eyes that were full of fear and doubt, sparkling with trepidation. "*Who* is your new God, Hannibal?" He knew the answer but needed Hannibal to say it, more for himself than for Will. There was always a peace that followed confession, and Will was determined to guide him there; be the shepherd to this lost little lamb.

Hannibal leaned into the warmth of Will's hand; a nervous smile quickly faded. His jaw quaked and his tongue froze, heart threatening to squeeze through the slats of his ribs and fall

to Will's feet; to be crushed or kept he didn't know. He swallowed hard, gnawing the inside of his cheek raw. He spoke as he exhaled a deep sigh. "*You*."

Will kept his face plain and grabbed the collar from Hannibal's hands. He rotated it, looking at it simply. A piece of cloth with faith and all of life sewn into it. He shot his eyes up, boring deep into Hannibal as he brought the collar to his lips. He kissed the inside of the collar, placing his lips along every inch knowing where it would sit on Hannibal's throat, perched up against his pulse. He licked his lips and with one hand, tilted Hannibal's chin up with a single finger. Will slowly fastened the collar around his neck and commanded, "Kneel."

Hannibal swallowed hard, not hesitating to get onto his knees. Will stroked Hannibal's cheek, rubbing a thumb over the bone. He smiled, *proud* of him. His voice was still and calm but *powerful*. "One last confession, Hannibal," every word hung from the tip of his tongue. There was a long pause before he continued. "Tell me of your new faith."

Hannibal trembled in Will's touch, voice shaking and nervous. God standing before him, calling out his voice, his fears, his soul. *His name.* Confession with this God was *easy*, words flowing forth like blood through his veins bringing life and breath, nourishing every part of him. "I want nothing more than to be at your side, or your feet if you asked. To love all of you, worship you, devote my life and loyalty to you." He took in a stuttered breath. "You've brought me a peace I have never known, and acceptance I never thought possible. You clawed through every veil, broke down every wall, and dug me out to sit in the palms of your hands."

Will smiled, entirely pleased. He leaned over and kissed Hannibal's forehead. He whispered into Hannibal's ear, "What a remarkable treasure you are, and what a rare gift you have given me." His hand moved to Hannibal's chin, gently opening his mouth, as the other worked to his belt. Hannibal sat beautifully and completely still, eyes glistening and unblinking. Will slipped his fingers past Hannibal's teeth, pulling down to open him further. "Now, show me how you love your God."

Will stepped forward into God's place, elevating himself beyond mortal man. He slid his heavy, hard cock into Hannibal's mouth with ease, and Hannibal moaned greedily. As the inches passed his lips, Will smiled and pet Hannibal's face. "I want you to seek pleasure. I want you to accept all your desires, your new God."

Will pulled his hips back and pushed forward again, fucking Hannibal's warm mouth, his tongue moving out of the way to accommodate all of God. Will rubbed a thumb over Hannibal's ear, gently shaking his head. "No more guilt from your old life, Hannibal. I absolve you and all your past transgressions."

Hannibal moaned against Will's cock, vibrating the head enough to bless his own tongue with the salt of precum. His hands shook in his lap, and his eyes fluttered at the taste of Will, the fullness of his cheeks; he was being given the opportunity to devour God himself, cradled and coddled by the hands of the divine. Will tugged Hannibal's hair gently, pulling his face slightly upward. "Eyes on me."

Hannibal nodded softly, eyes locked on Will, whose face was calm. His eyes pierced through to the very core of him, seeing all that Hannibal had tried to hide, but Will embraced it all

with open arms. His hand let go of his hair, fingertips grazing his scalp, then thumb along the sharp bones of his cheek. “You’re beautiful, Hannibal, and all for me. My gift and treasure.” Will watched as any remaining tension seeped from Hannibal’s bones, and he fucked him a little harder, cockhead kissing the back of Hannibal’s throat.

The soft praises and touches of his God made Hannibal weep softly, a few tears spilling down his cheeks. Will did as Hannibal had done, knowing he would remember. Recreation of their beginning amidst the blooming of a new one. Will wiped away Hannibal’s tears, bringing his thumb to his lips; Hannibal tasted *divine*. He wove his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, gripping lightly. He picked up pace, chasing the fire roaring within him. Hannibal never looked away as Will spilled into his throat, thick and heavy, not even a single blink. Hannibal pushed himself forward as far as he could onto Will, taking everything and holding nothing back. A small whimper was muffled by the emptying cock in his mouth, spilling down into his eager throat.

Will cooed at him, praises effortlessly moving down his tongue to Hannibal’s ear. He hesitantly pulled away when Hannibal stopped swallowing, knowing he greedily took every drop. Will beamed at the flickering stars in Hannibal’s eyes, absolutely lost in the new universe they had created for themselves. He delicately wiped his face with his sleeve, washing away all his tears. When he was clean and tucked away, Will knelt to be at Hannibal’s level, nodding and comforting him. Will never had faith in God, but what he felt for Hannibal was something so much more. The fear in Hannibal’s eyes dissolved, the tremble in his hands melted. His new God wanted him, *all* of him, reciprocating the gift he gave.

Will’s hand ventured under Hannibal’s robe. He knew without doubt Hannibal would be hard, primed for his God, and Will pulled his heavy cock into his hand. He kissed Hannibal’s lips, trailing across his cheek to his temple, then down towards his neck. Hannibal was unable to stifle moans as Will stroked him, warm fingers curling around his throbbing cock. Will pulled away and whispered into his ear through a smile, “Worshippers are to be rewarded.”

Just pleasuring Will alone had already brought Hannibal close. What bigger pleasure was there than pleasing God, sacrificing for him, and then devouring him? Will slowly worked him, stretching out his pleasure as long as possible, sliding his fist from swollen tip to begging hilt. He held Hannibal’s head in his free hand, fingers lacing into his hair, stroking along his scalp in small circles. He watched Hannibal unravel as he came; his eyes fluttered as his brows danced in waves. Pitiful moans and high-pitched whimpers echoed against the walls like a choir chanting prayer. Will pulled Hannibal in to rest against his chest, head propped up on his shoulder, as he milked every drop out of him, despite the wince and wails from overstimulation. God would take everything, and God would *give* everything. Hannibal buried his face into Will’s neck, worshipping into the throb of his throat. Will held Hannibal’s cock until it softened then turned Hannibal’s head to the side. He brought his coated fingers to Hannibal’s mouth, and he opened without being asked, taking it in greedily. Will stroked his back as Hannibal suckled, faithfully cleaning every crease of his knuckles. He kissed the back of Hannibal’s head, holding him tight, and spoke softly, “How good does your new faith taste?”

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Hannibal didn't give the church much reason for his departure, he didn't feel he needed to. He feigned some excuse, whatever they would believe. He couldn't tell them the truth, of course. That a man took his faith, and was giving it willingly, excitedly. Ripped from his old God's hands, rewritten and reborn. It felt odd to leave, he'd spent most of his life in church, but he knew now that his place wasn't there anymore. He realized it never had been; just a path to wander under his true God smiled at him. He learned home was not a place with four walls decorated with windows of stained glass, elaborate paintings displayed in every corner. It wasn't somewhere with hardwood floors and an echoing core with a pedestal for him to stand. Home was woven into the thread of his faith, a place where he felt warm and loved, a place where his entirety could expand and fill every space it could reach. Home was along the creases of open palms, following the lines of a smile. It was within a voice and flesh and bone, held together with sinew and breath. Home was where God was, where Will was. Anywhere in the world, that is where Hannibal would reside.

Will showed up on his last night to help Hannibal pack; it only felt right. Even if it was what Hannibal *wanted*, he was still the cause. He liked unstitching old parts of Hannibal's life and filling in the gaps. Besides, what kind of God would be if he abandoned his worshipper? As much as Hannibal didn't want to leave Will's side, Will didn't want to leave him either. Irreparably and irreversibly blurred, a holy union no God could touch but him. When the last of Hannibal's meager personal belongings were packed away, they looked at each other warmly.

Will smiled and tucked Hannibal's hair behind his ear; he looked different in street clothes versus his religious garb. He chuckled at the sight, and decided he'd buy him new robes down the road; if nothing else, for his own amusement. He grabbed Hannibal by the nape of his neck and pulled him in, kissing him long and deep, tongue welcomed to explore freely. He kept kissing Hannibal until his lungs burned with the need for fresh air. He gently pushed Hannibal onto his bed, and Will was amused that this was the first time they were ever on a bed. Nothing about them was conventional. Will straddled him, thick and muscular thighs settling around his hips. He let Hannibal take off his shirt and unbutton his pants. Will then stripped Hannibal, tugged down Hannibal's pants and shimmied off his own.

He kissed and nibbled down Hannibal's neck, ending near his nipple. He licked it, gently blowing cool air on it and making it hard. He brought it into his mouth and sucked it, gently twisting the other with his hand. He bit it, not too rough, but just enough to make Hannibal squeal. He licked his lips, traveling down, planting his lips on the bones of Hannibal's hips, and kissing the tip of his cock. A glisten of precum spread over his lips, and he licked the salt clean. Will leaned to the bedside table, giving a wry smile at what was there; he shouldn't have been surprised. He wondered if Hannibal had always used the oil for himself, or if it was a habit he adopted only after meeting Will. He stared down at Hannibal, watching the quick rise and fall of his chest. The mutual hunger in their eyes met, wrestling and crawling into each other. Just the sight of Hannibal laid out, sweating and panting before anything had even started, hopeful and barely clinging to the cusp of patience for what might happen, was *just* enough to sate the famished desire buried inside the crux of Will. But God was greedy; he wanted *more,* wanted all Hannibal had to offer. And Hannibal was readily willing to give, sacrifice anything his God commanded. As Will slowly oiled his fingers, Hannibal obediently spread his legs; shameless as he held his thighs apart, opening the entirety of himself for Will to consume as he pleased.

Will slowly fingered Hannibal, smiling as he invaded; this was his first time to really make him unravel. Bring him to the brink of destruction then stitch him back together, complete and anew. He wanted to enjoy it as long as possible, savor his undoing. He probed and encircled the begging bundle of nerves inside, and Hannibal bucked his hips, the simple intrusion lighting a wildfire through his nerves. Will pushed a gentle hand down on his pelvis, keeping him steady and secure. Two fingers then three, and Hannibal's cock was twitching without even being touched. Will gave Hannibal time to adjust to his fingers relentlessly fucking him before adding a fourth and final finger. It slipped in deliciously, nearly being swallowed, and Hannibal gripped the sheets and moaned. Will worked him open, bringing Hannibal up the very edge, seeing just how far he could push him just like this, writhing in the palm of his hand.

Satisfied with Hannibal's begging and whining, rendered nearly mute with just his hand, Will pulled his fingers out. He was slow, watching Hannibal adapt to the sudden emptiness. Will dragged his fingers down Hannibal's thighs before placing his legs over his shoulders. He slicked up his cock and smiled at Hannibal, tip threatening to breach. He stroked Hannibal's face and gently asked, "Tell me what you want, Hannibal. What can God give you?"

Hannibal's eyes prayed and pleaded, but he needed to use his words, but his voice was lost to him. He tried to push back on Will's cock, trying to fuck himself without having to ask aloud, he was just out of reach. Will's smile turned cold, and he grabbed Hannibal's face and demanded again. "What do you want?"

Anticipation and ecstasy were eating Hannibal alive, devouring marrow and tendon. He tried again to rock his hips onto Will and Will tilted his hips back, clicking his tongue in disappointment. He spat on Hannibal's chest and rubbed it into his chest hair, hand slithering up to weakly grip his throat. "Use your words, Hannibal. I need to hear it, *feel* it. What can *your God* give *you*?"

Words finally croaked out as he started to cry. Confession yet again yanking sound out of him. His entire body heaved with effort. "F-fuck me, *please.*" His words were broken by gasps of air, disrupted by sobs threatening to spill and drown them both. "I want, *need*… to f-feel you… inside me, I-I want all of you. *Pl -"*

Will interrupted his begging by sliding inside him. He was slow and patient, giving Hannibal time to adjust to the fullness. At the hilt, he stilled, enjoying Hannibal's failed attempts to fuck back. Hannibal tried everything to get every inch of Will inside him, needing his totality to reach completion, *ascension.* Will growled and fucked him thoroughly, entirely, dragging his cock against Hannibal's spent prostate. Long, deep strokes to reach the very depths of him. Hannibal was on the edge of bursting, cock twitching and leaking against his stomach. Will picked up speed, and Hannibal sputtered incoherent moans. Hannibal felt so good on Will's cock, encompassed by someone devout and weeping; who'd be pleading for more if only his voice worked. Hannibal was beautiful, skin blushing and glowing. Embers of ecstasy sparked and singed and Will felt himself get close. His hand returned to Hannibal's throat, squeezing lightly, letting his head fill with static. Will waited until blush blessed Hannibal's sharp cheek, then he moved his hand to Hannibal's mouth and covered it, pinching his nose, cutting off his air. Hannibal didn't protest; he'd give Will everything, even his life. Whatever

Will gave, whatever he took, was a gift to be treasured. Hannibal's deep groans caught on Will's palm, almost fueling him to fuck faster.

With his free hand, Will grabbed Hannibal's aching cock and within a few strokes Hannibal came, unable to resist God's touch, erupting an outpouring through Will's fingers, and they blissfully came together. Hannibal all over himself and Will's hand, Will deep inside, giving him everything he could, all he could ever want. Every request granted; every prayer answered by the heat filling him to the brim. He released Hannibal's mouth and let him breathe. Hannibal gasped for air as he bucked back against Will, stimulated by the flooding warmth and twitching cock inside. As they came, a gold, elaborate halo bloomed behind Will, beautiful and sacred. It was more than imagination fueled by the pumping of euphoria through every vein of Hannibal's body. It was undeniably divine. Hannibal smiled, and tears flowed freely down his flushed cheeks.

Will caught his breath and gently let Hannibal's legs down. He then fell to Hannibal's side, still inside him, never wanting to let go. He pulled Hannibal into his chest, soothing his trembles and quieting his cries. Will helped settle Hannibal's erratic gasping. *Easy, in and out, breathe with me. Yes, just like that, so good.* Will's devotion mirrored back to Hannibal in words spoken just above a whisper, carefully cradled by his tongue. *Shhh, you're alright. You felt so good, Hannibal. Everything I could ever want and need, right here with you. So perfect, just for me, my beautiful boy, no one could make me happier, feel more loved.*

He petted his hair and down his back until Hannibal was fully calmed. He slipped out as he softened, but Hannibal whimpered when Will tried to get up to leave, clinging for him to stay. Will kissed his temples, speaking softly. "Let me take care of you, Hannibal. I'll be right back. Let God return your love."

Hannibal begrudgingly complied and Will left and returned with wet, warm cloths, delicately cleaning Hannibal. The soft heat washed over every inch of his skin and Hannibal mewled and melted into the sheets. Will regretted their need to depart, for he wished to give him a bath as Hannibal had done for him. *Next time.* Will crawled back into bed with him, holding him tightly while they slept, just for a short while. The sun crawled through the window, kissing their faces through tall windows. Will woke and roused Hannibal, dressing them both. He brought Hannibal's hand to his lips, kissing his knuckles and his overturned wrist. They smiled at each other and held hands as they left, fingers interlaced. Their secrets remained unknown to all and any but them.

Chapter End Notes

MUAH huge thanks to everyone for reading this and being patient! this was super fun to write and thank you to everyone who helped make this fic a reality <3 i'd love to hear all your thoughts <33

ty fleabag, ty alex, ty hannibal for lending so beautifully to priest kink <3

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